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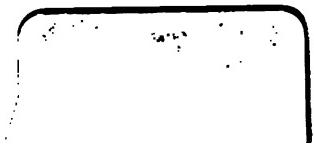
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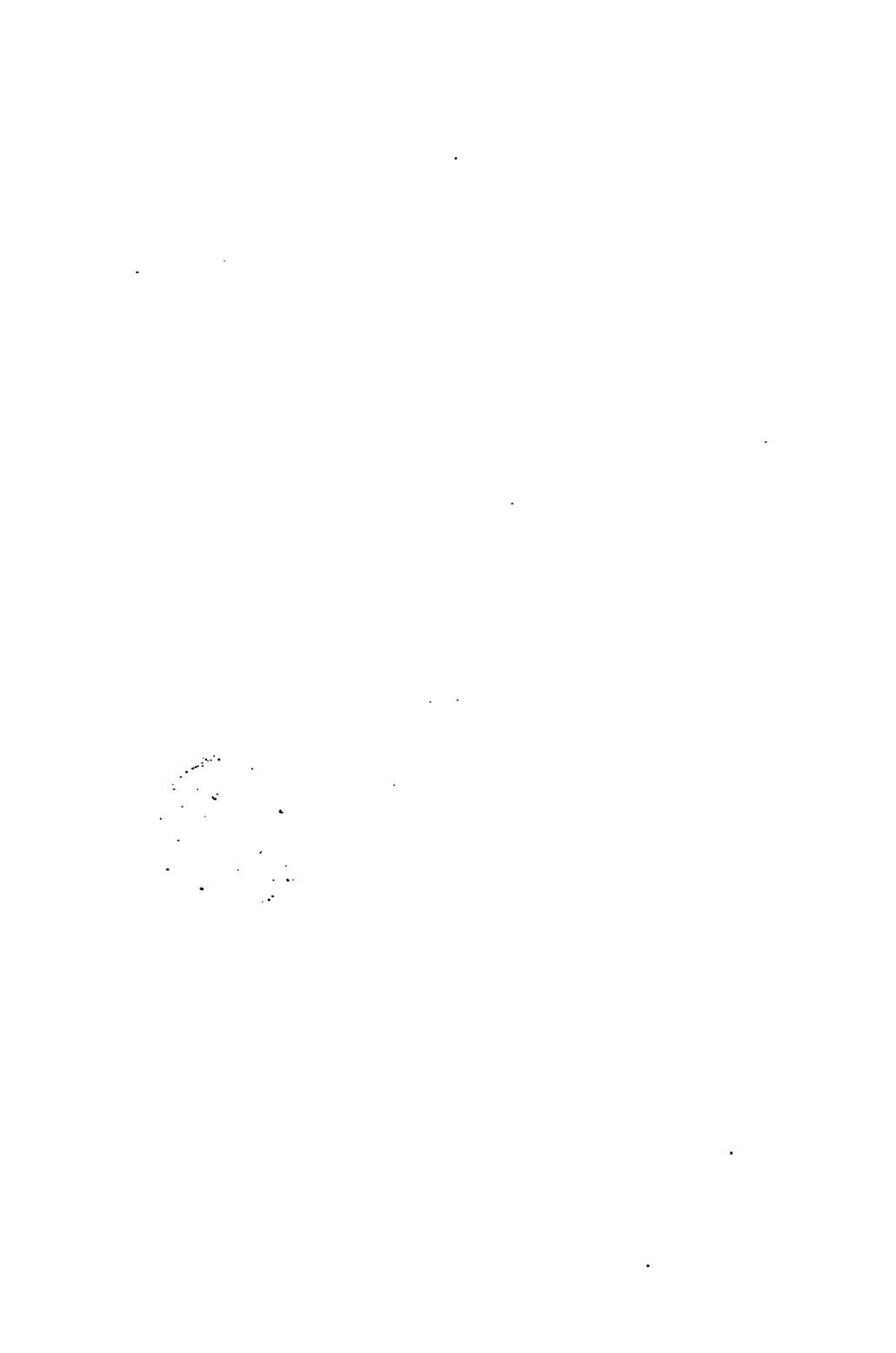




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THE BERTRAMS.

A Novel.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "BARCHESTER TOWERS," "DOCTOR THORNE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE BERTRAMS.

CHAPTER I.

SIR LIONEL GOES TO HIS WOOING.

YES, they were off. All the joys of that honeymoon shall be left to the imagination of the reader. Their first conversation, as it took place in the carriage which bore them from Mr. Bertram's door, has been given. Those which followed were probably more or less of the same nature. Sir Henry, no doubt, did strive to give some touch of romance to the occasion ; but in no such attempt would his wife assist him. To every material proposition that he made, she gave a ready assent ; in everything she acceded to his views ; she would dine at two, or at eight, as he pleased ; she was ready to stay two weeks, or only two days in Paris, as best suited him ; she would adapt herself to pictures, or to architecture, or to theatres, or to society, or to going on and seeing nothing, exactly as he adapted

himself. She never frowned, or looked black, or had headaches, or couldn't go on, or wouldn't stay still, or turned herself into a Niobean deluge, as some ladies, and very nice ladies too, will sometimes do on their travels. But she would not talk of love, or hold his hand, or turn her cheek to his. She had made her bargain, and would keep to it. Of that which she had promised him, she would give him full measure; of that which she had not promised him—of which she had explained to him that she had nothing to give—of that she would make no attempt to give anything.

So they spent their Christmas and opened the new year at Nice, and made an excursion along the Cornice road to Genoa, during which Lady Harcourt learned for the first time that the people of Italy are not so free from cold winds as is generally imagined; and then, early in February, they returned to their house in Eaton Square. How she soon became immersed in society, and he in Parliament and the County Courts, we may also leave to the imagination of the reader. In a month or two from that time, when the rigours of a London May shall have commenced, we will return to them again. In the meantime, we must go back to Hadley—the two old Bertrams, and dear Miss Baker.

The marriage-feast, prepared by Miss Baker

for the wedding guests, did not occupy very long ; nor was there any great inducement for those assembled to remain with Mr. Bertram. He and Miss Baker soon found themselves again alone ; and were no sooner alone than the business of life recommenced.

‘It’s a very splendid match for her,’ said Mr. Bertram.

‘Yes, I suppose it is,’ said Miss Baker. Miss Baker in her heart of hearts had never quite approved of the marriage.

‘And now, Mary, what do you mean to do ?’

‘Oh, I’ll see and get these things taken away,’ said she.

‘Yes, yes ; stop a minute ; that’s of course. But what I mean is, what do you mean to do with yourself ? you can’t go back and live at Littlebath all alone ?’

If I were to use the word ‘flabbergasted’ as expressing Miss Baker’s immediate state of mind, I should draw down on myself the just anger of the critics, in that I had condescended to the use of slang ; but what other word will so well express what is meant ? She had fully intended to go back to Littlebath, and had intended to do so at the earliest moment that would be possible. Was not Sir Lionel still at Littlebath ? And, moreover, she fully intended to live there. That she would have some little difficulty in the matter,

she had anticipated. Her own income—that which was indefeasibly her own—was very small; by far too small to admit of her permanently keeping on those rooms in Montpellier Terrace. Hitherto their income, her own and Caroline's put together, had been very comfortable; for Mr. Bertram had annually paid to her a sum which of itself would have been sufficient for her own living. But she had not known what difference Caroline's marriage might make in this allowance. It had been given to herself without any specification that it had been so given for any purpose; but yet it had been an understood thing that Caroline was to live with her and be supported. And though Caroline's income had also been used, it had gone rather in luxurious enjoyments than in necessary expenses; in the keep of a horse, for instance, in a journey to Jerusalem, in a new grand piano, and such like. Now there might naturally be a doubt whether under altered circumstances this allowance from Mr. Bertram would remain unaltered.

But it had never occurred to her that she would be asked to live at Hadley. That idea did now occur to her, and therefore she stood before her uncle hesitating in her answer, and—may my inability to select any better word be taken in excuse?—‘flabbergasted’ in her mind and feelings.

But her doom followed quickly on her hesitation. ‘Because,’ said Mr. Bertram, ‘there is plenty of room here. There can be no need of two houses and two establishments now; you had better send for your things and fix yourself here at once.’

‘But I couldn’t leave the rooms at Littlebath without a quarter’s notice;—the coward’s plea; a long day, my lord, a long day—‘that was particularly understood when I got them so cheap’

‘There will be no difficulty in reletting them at this time of the year,’ growled Mr. Bertram.

‘Oh, no, I suppose not; one would have to pay something, of course. But, dear me! one can hardly leave the place where one has lived so long all of a moment.’

‘Why not?’ demanded the tyrant.

‘Well, I don’t know. I can hardly say why not; but one has so many people to see, and so many things to do, and so much to pack up.’

It may be easily conceived that in such an encounter Miss Baker would not achieve victory. She had neither spirit for the fight, nor power to use it even had the spirit been there; but she effected a compromise by the very dint of her own weakness. ‘Yes, certainly,’ she said. ‘As Mr. Bertram thought it best, she would be very happy to live with him at Hadley—most happy,

of course ; but mightn't she go down and pack up her things, and settle with everybody, and say good-bye to her friends ?' Oh, those friends ! that horrible Miss Todd !

And thus she got a month of grace. She was to go down immediately after Christmas-day, and be up again at Hadley, and fixed there permanently, before the end of January.

She wrote to Caroline on the subject, rather plaintively ; but owning that it was of course her duty to stay by her uncle now that he was so infirm. It would be very dull, of course, she said ; but any place would be dull now that she, Caroline, was gone. And it would be sad giving up her old friends. She named one or two, and among them Si Lionel. 'It would be a great pleasure to me,' she went on to say, 'if I could be the means of reconciling the two brothers—not but what Sir Henry Harcourt will always be Mr. Bertram's favourite ; I am sure of that. I don't think I shall mind leaving Miss Todd, though she does pretend to be so friendly ; I was never quite sure she was sincere ; and then she does talk so very loud ; and, in spite of all she says, I am not sure she's not looking out for a husband.'

And then she went back to Littlebath, intent on enjoying her short reprieve. Something might happen ; she did not ask herself what.

The old gentleman might not last long ; but she certainly did not speculate on his death. Or ; —she had a sort of an idea that there might be an ‘or,’ though she never allowed herself to dwell on it as a reality. But on one point she did make up her mind, that if it should be her destiny to keep house for either of those two gentlemen, she would much rather keep house for Sir Lionel than for his brother.

Her absolute money-dealings had always been with Mr. Pritchett ; and as she passed through town, Mr. Pritchett came to her and made her the usual quarterly payment.

‘But, Mr. Pritchett,’ said she, ‘I am going to live with Mr. Bertram after another month or so.’

‘Oh, ma’am ; yes, ma’am ; that will be very proper, ma’am. I always supposed it would be so when Miss Caroline was gone,’ said Pritchett, in a melancholy tone.

‘But will it be proper for me to have this money now ?’

‘Oh, yes, ma’am. It wouldn’t be my duty to stop any payments till I get orders. Mr. Bertram never forgets anything, ma’am. If he’d meant me to stop it, he wouldn’t have forgot to say so.’

‘Oh, very well, Mr. Pritchett ;’ and Miss Baker was going away.

‘But, one word, if you please, ma’am. . I don’t

detain you, ma'am, do I?' and you might have guessed by Pritchett's voice that he was quite willing to let her go if she wished, even though his own death on the spot might be the instant result.

'Oh dear, no, Mr. Pritchett,' said Miss Baker.

'We all see how things have gone, ma'am, now;—about Miss Caroline, I mean.'

'Yes, she is Lady Harcourt now.'

'Oh, yes, I know that, ma'am,' and Mr. Pritchett here sank to the lowest bathos of misery. 'I know she's Lady Harcourt very well. I didn't mean her ladyship any disrespect.'

'Oh dear, no, of course not, Mr. Pritchett. Who would think such a thing of you, who's known her from a baby?'

'Yes, I have know'd her from a babby, ma'am. That's just it; and I've know'd you from amost a babby too, ma'am.'

'That was a very long time ago, Mr. Pritchett.'

'Yes, it is some years now, certainly, Miss Baker. I'm not so young as I was; I know that.' Mr. Pritchett's voice at this juncture would have softened the heart of any stone that had one. 'But this is what it is, ma'am; you're going to live with the old gentleman now.'

'Yes, I believe I am.'

'Well, now; about Mr. George, ma'am.'

'Mr. George!'

‘Yes, Mr. George, Miss Baker. It ain’t of course for me to say anything of what goes on between young ladies and young gentlemen. I don’t know anything about it, and never did ; and I don’t suppose I never shall now. But they two was to have been one, and now they’re two.’ Mr. Pritchett could not get on any further without pausing for breath.

‘The match was broken off, you know.’

‘It was broke off. I say nothing about that, nor about them who did it. I know nothing, and therefore I say nothing ; but this I do say : that it will be very hard—very hard, and very cruel if so that the old gentleman is set against Mr. George because Sir Henry Harcourt has got a handle to his name for himself.’

The conference ended in a promise on Miss Baker’s part that she, at least, would say nothing against Mr. George ; but with an assurance, also, that it was impossible for her to say anything in his favour.

‘You may be sure of this, Mr. Pritchett, that my uncle will never consult me about his money.’

‘He’ll never consult any human being, ma’am. He wouldn’t consult Solomon if Solomon were to go to Hadley o’ purpose. But you might slip in a word that Mr. George was not in fault ; mightn’t you, ma’am ?’

Miss Baker reiterated her promise that she

would not at any rate say anything evil of George Bertram.

'He is such a foolish young man, ma'am ; so like a baby about money. It's that's why I feel for him, because he is so foolish.'

And then Miss Baker prosecuted her journey, and reached Littlebath in safety.

She had not been long there before Sir Lionel had heard all the news. Miss Baker, without knowing that a process of pumping had been applied to her, soon made him understand that for the present Sir Harcourt had certainly not been received into the place of heir. It was clear that but a very moderate amount of the old gentleman's wealth—he was usually now called the old gentleman by them all ; Sir Lionel, Miss Baker, Mr. Pritchett, and others—had been bestowed on the rising lawyer ; and that, as far as that point was concerned, the game was still open. But then, if it was open to him, Sir Lionel, through Miss Baker, it was also open to his son George. And it appeared from Miss Baker's testimony that, during the whole period of these wedding doings, no word had escaped the mouth of the old gentleman in vituperation or anger against George. Perhaps George after all might be the best card. Oh, what an excellent card might he be if he would only consent to guide himself by the commonest rules of decent prudence !

But then, as Mr. Pritchett had truly observed, Mr. George was so foolish ! Moreover, Sir Lionel was not blind to the reflection that the old gentleman would never countenance his marriage with Miss Baker. Whatever Mr. Bertram's good intentions Miss Baker-wards might be, they would undoubtedly be frustrated by such a marriage. If Sir Lionel decided on Miss Baker, things must be so arranged that the marriage should be postponed till that tedious old gentleman should move himself off the scene ; and the tedious old gentleman, moreover, must not be allowed to know anything about it.

But with Miss Todd there need be no secrecy, no drawback, no delay—no drawback but that of doubtful reception ; and after reception, of doubtful masterdom.

On thorough review of all the circumstances, much balancing them in his high mind, Sir Lionel at last thus resolved. He would throw himself, his heart, and his fortune at the feet of Miss Todd. If there accepted, he would struggle with every muscle of the manhood which was yet within him for that supremacy in purse and power which of law and of right belongs to the man. He thought he knew himself, and that it would not be easy for a woman to get the better of him. But if there rejected—and he could not confess but what there was a doubt—he would im-

mediately fall back upon Miss Baker. Whatever he did must be done immediately, for in less than a month's time, Miss Baker would be out of his reach altogether. As to seeking Miss Baker at Hadley, that would be above even his courage. All must be done within the next month. If on Miss Baker was to fall the honour of being Lady Bertram, she must not only receive him within the month, but, having done so, must also agree to wear her vestal zone yet a little longer, till that troublesome old gentleman should have departed.

Such being his month's work—he had not quite four weeks left when he came to this resolution—he wisely resolved to commence it at once.

So on one Monday morning he sallied out to the Paragon about two o'clock. At that hour he knew Miss Todd would be surely at home; for at half-past one she ate her lunch. In the regularity of her eatings and her drinkings, Miss Todd might have been taken as an example by all the ladies of Littlebath. Sir Lionel's personal appearance has been already described. Considering his age, he was very well preserved. He was still straight; did not fumble much in his walk; and had that decent look of military decorum which, since the days of Cæsar and the duke, has been always held to accompany a hook-nose. He had considered much about his toilet; indeed, he did

that habitually ; but on this occasion he had come to the conclusion that he had better make no unusual sacrifice to the Graces. A touch of the curling-iron to his whiskers, or a surtout that should be absolutely fresh from the tailor's hands, might have an effect with Miss Baker ; but if any impression was to be made on Miss Todd, it would not be done by curled whiskers or a new coat. She must be won, if won at all, by the unsophisticated man.

So the unsophisticated man knocked at the door in the Paragon. Yes ; Miss Todd was at home. Up he went, and found not only Miss Todd, but also with Miss Todd the venerable Mrs. Shortpointz, settling all the details for a coming rubber of whist for that evening.

' Ah, Sir Lionel ; how do ? Sit down. Very well, my dear,' —Miss Todd called everybody my dear, even Sir Lionel himself sometimes ; but on the present occasion she was addressing Mrs. Shortpointz—' I'll be there at eight ; but mind this, I won't sit down with Lady Ruth, nor yet with Miss Ruff.' So spoke Miss Todd, who, by dint of her suppers and voice, was becoming rather autocratic at Littlebath.

' You shan't, Miss Todd. Lady Ruth—'

' Very well ; that's all I bargain for. And now here's Sir Lionel ; how lucky ! Sir Lionel, you can be so civil, and so useful. Do give Mrs.

Shortpointz your arm home. Her niece was to call ; but there's been some mistake. And Mrs. Shortpointz does not like walking alone. Come, Sir Lionel.'

Sir Lionel strove against the order ; but it was in vain. He had to yield ; and walked away with old Mrs. Shortpointz on his arm. It was hard, we must acknowledge, that a man of Sir Lionel's age and standing should be so employed at such a moment, because that flirt, Maria Shortpointz, had gone out to see young Mr. Garded ride by in his pink coat and spattered boots. He would have let her fall and break her leg, only that by doing so he would have prolonged the time of his own attendance on her. She lived half across Littlebath ; and her step, ordinarily slow, was slower then usual now that she was leaning on a knight's arm. At last she was deposited at home ; and the gallant colonel, having scornfully repudiated her offer of cake and sherry, flew back to the Paragon on the wings of love—in a street cab, for which he had to pay eighteenpence.

But he was all too late. Miss Todd had gone out in her fly just three minutes since ; and thus a whole day was lost.

On the Tuesday, in proper course, he was due at Miss Baker's. But for this turn, Miss Baker must be neglected. At the same hour he again

knocked at the door of the Paragon, and was again admitted, and now Miss Todd was all alone. She was rarely left so very long, and the precious moments must be seized at once. Sir Lionel, with that military genius which was so peculiarly his own, determined to use his yesterday's defeat in aid of to-day's victory. He would make even Mrs. Shortpointz serviceable.

When gentlemen past sixty make love to ladies past forty, it may be supposed that they are not so dilatory in their proceedings as younger swains and younger maidens. Time is then behind them, not before them ; and urges them on to quick decisions. It may be presumed, moreover, that this pair knew their own minds.

'How cruel you were to me yesterday !' said Sir Lionel, seating himself not very close to her —nor yet very far from her.

'What ! about poor Mrs. Shortpointz ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! Poor old lady ; she didn't think so, I am sure. One ought to be of use sometimes, you know, Sir Lionel.'

'True, true, Miss Todd ; quite true. But I was particularly unfortunate yesterday. I wished that Mrs. Shortpointz was hanging—anywhere except on my arm. I did, indeed.'

'Ha ! ha ! ha ! Poor Mrs. Shortpointz ! And she was so full of you last night. The beau ideal

of manly beauty ! that was what she called you. She did indeed. Ha ! ha ! ha !'

'She was very kind.'

'And then we all quizzed her about you ; and Miss Finesse called her Lady Bertram. You can't think how funny we old women are when we get together. There wasn't a gentleman in the room—except Mr. Fuzzybell ; and he never seems to make any difference. But I tell you what, Sir Lionel ; a certain friend of yours didn't seem to like it when we called Mrs. Shortpointz Lady Bertram.'

'And were you that friend, Miss Todd ?'

'I ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! No ; not I, but Miss Baker. And I'll tell you what, Sir Lionel,' said Miss Todd, intending to do a kinder act for Miss Baker than Miss Baker would have done for her. 'And I'll tell you what ; Miss Baker is the nicest-looking woman of her time of life in Littlebath. I don't care who the other is. I never saw her look better than she did last night ; never.' This was good-natured on the part of Miss Todd ; but it sounded in Sir Lionel's ears as though it did not augur well for his hopes.

'Yes ; she's very nice ; very nice indeed. But I know one, Miss Todd, that's much nicer.' And Sir Lionel drew his chair a little nearer.

'What, Mrs. Shortpointz, I suppose. Ha ! ha ! ha ! Well, every man to his taste.'

'I wonder whether I may speak to you seriously, Miss Todd, for five minutes?'

'Oh laws, yes; why not? But don't tell me any secrets, Sir Lionel; for I shan't keep them.'

'I hope what I may say need not be kept a secret long. You joke with me about Miss Baker; but you cannot really believe that my affections are placed there? You must, I think, have guessed by this time—'

'I am the worst hand in the world at guessing anything.'

'I am not a young man, Miss Todd—'

'No; and she isn't a young woman. She's fifty. It would all be very proper in that respect.'

'I'm not thinking of Miss Baker, Miss Todd.'

'Dear! well now, I really thought you were thinking of her. And I'll tell you this, Sir Lionel; if you want a wife to look after you, you couldn't do better than think of her—a nice, good-tempered, cheerful, easy, good-looking woman; with none of the Littlebath nastiness about her; —and a little money too, I've no doubt. How could you do better than think of her?' Would it not have softened Miss Baker's heart towards her friend if she could have heard all this?

'Ah; you say this to try me. I know you do.'

'Try you! no; but I want you to try Miss Baker.'

· Well : I am going to make an attempt of that kind, certainly : certainly I am. But it is not with Miss Baker, as I cannot but think you know ;' and then he paused to collect his ideas, and take in at a *coup d'œil* the weak point to which his attack should be turned. Meanwhile, Miss Todd sat silent. She knew by this time what was coming ; and knew also, that in courtesy the gentleman should be allowed to have his say. Sir Lionel drew his chair again nearer—it was now very near—and thus began :—

‘ Dear Sarah ! ’ How he had found out that Miss Todd’s name was Sarah it might be difficult to say. Her signature was S. Todd ; and Sir Lionel had certainly never heard her called by her Christian name. But facts were with him. She undoubtedly had been christened Sarah.

‘ Dear Sarah ! ’

‘ Ha ! ha ! ha ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! ’ laughed Miss Todd, with terrible loudness, with a shaking of her sides, throwing herself backwards and forwards in the corner of her sofa. It was not civil, and so Sir Lionel felt. When you first call your lady-love by her Christian name, you do not like to have the little liberty made a subject of ridicule—you feel it by far less if the matter be taken up seriously against you as a crime on your part.

‘ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ’ continued Miss Todd, roaring

in her laughter louder than ever ; ‘ I don’t think, Sir Lionel, I was ever called Sarah before since the day I was born ; and it does sound so funny. Sarah ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! ’

Sir Lionel was struck dumb. What could he say when his little tenderness was met in such a manner ?

‘ Call me Sally, if you like, Sir Lionel. My brothers and sisters, and uncles and aunts, and all those sort of people, always called me Sally. But, Sarah ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! Suppose you call me Sally, Sir Lionel.’

Sir Lionel tried, but he could not call her Sally ; his lips at that moment would not form the sound.

But the subject had now been introduced. If he should ever be able to claim her as his own, he might then call her Sarah, or Sally, or use any other term of endearment which the tenderness of the moment might suggest. When that day should come, perhaps he might have his own little joke ; but, in the meantime, the plunge had been taken, and he could now swim on.

‘ Miss Todd, you now know what my feelings are, and I hope that you will at any rate not disapprove of them. We have known each other for some time, and have, I hope, enjoyed and valued each other’s society.’ Miss Todd here made a little bow, but she said nothing.

She had a just perception that Sir Lionel should be permitted to have his say, and that, as matters had become serious, it would be well for her to wait till he had done, and then she might have her say. So she merely bowed, by way of giving a civil acquiescence in Sir Lionel's last little suggestion.

'I have hoped so, dear Miss Todd'—he had taken a moment to consider, and thought that he had better drop the Sarah altogether for the present. 'In myself, I can safely say that it has been so. With you, I feel that I am happy, and at my ease. Your modes of thought and way of life are all such as I admire and approve,'—Miss Todd again bowed—'and—and—what I mean is, that I think we both live very much after the same fashion.'

Miss Todd, who knew everything that went on in Littlebath, and was *au fait* at every bit of scandal and tittle-tattle in the place, had probably heard more of the fashion of Sir Lionel's life than he was aware. In places such as Littlebath, ladies such as Miss Todd do have sources of information which are almost miraculous. But still she said nothing. She merely thought that Sir Lionel was a good deal mistaken in the opinion which he had last expressed.

'I am not a young man,' continued Sir Lionel. 'My brother, you know, is a very old man, and

there are but fifteen years' difference between us.' This was a mistake of Sir Lionel's; the real difference being ten years. 'And you, I know, are hardly yet past your youth.'

'I was forty-five last Guy Fawkes' day,' said Miss Todd.

'Then there are fifteen years' difference between us.' The reader will please to read 'twenty.' 'Can you look over that difference, and take me, old as I am, for your companion for life? Shall we not both be happier if we have such a companion? As to money—'

'Oh, Sir Lionel, don't trouble about that; nor yet about your age. If I wanted to marry, I'd as lief have an old man as a young one; perhaps liefer: and as to money, I've got enough for myself, and I have no doubt you have too'—nevertheless, Miss Todd did know of that heavy over-due bill at the livery stables, and had heard that the very natty groom who never left Sir Lionel's phaëton for a moment was a sworn bailiff; sworn to bring the carriage and horses back to the livery-stable yard—'but the fact is, I don't want to marry.'

'Do you mean, Miss Todd, that you will prefer to live in solitude for ever?'

'Oh, as for solitude, I'm not much of a Robinson Crusoe, nor yet an Alexander Selkirk. I never found any of its charms. But, Lord

bless you, Sir Lionel, people never leave me in solitude. I'm never alone. My sister Patty has fifteen children. I could have half of them to live with me if I liked it.' This view of the case did throw some cold water on Sir Lionel's ardour.

'And you are quite resolved on this?' he said, with a dash of expiring sentiment in his tone.

'What! to have Patty's children? No, I find it more convenient to pay for their schooling.'

'But you are quite resolved to—to—to give me no other, no more favourable answer?'

'Oh! about marrying. On that subject, Sir Lionel, my mind is altogether made up. Miss Todd I am, and Miss Todd I mean to remain. To tell the truth plainly, I like to be number one in my own house. Lady Bertram, I am quite sure, will be a fortunate and happy woman; but then, she'll be number two, I take it. Eh, Sir Lionel?'

Sir Lionel smiled and laughed, and looked at the ground, and then looked up again; but he did not deny the imputation. 'Well,' said he, 'I trust we shall still remain friends.'

'Oh, certainly; why not?' replied Miss Todd.

And so they parted. Sir Lionel took his hat and stick, and went his way.

CHAPTER II.

HE TRIES HIS HAND AGAIN.

MISS TODD shook hands with him as he went, and then, putting on her bonnet and cloak, got into her fly.

She felt some little triumph at her heart in thinking that Sir Lionel had wished to marry her. Had she not, she would hardly have been a woman. But by far her strongest feeling was one of dislike to him for not having wished to marry Miss Baker. She had watched the gallant soldier closely for the last year, and well knew how tenderly he had been used to squeeze Miss Baker's hand. He had squeezed her own hand too; but what was that? She made others the subject of jokes, and was prepared to be joked upon herself. Whatever Oliver Sir Lionel, or other person, might give her, she would give back to him or to her—always excepting Mrs. Leake—a Rowland that should be quite as good. But Miss Baker was

no subject for a joke, and Sir Lionel was in duty bound to have proposed to her.

It is perhaps almost true that no one can touch pitch and not be defiled. Miss Todd had been touching pitch for many years past, and was undoubtedly defiled to a certain extent. But the grime with her had never gone deep ; it was not ingrained ; it had not become an ineradicable stain ; it was dirt on which soap-and-water might yet operate. May we not say that her truth and good-nature, and love of her fellow-creatures, would furnish her at last with the means whereby she might be cleansed ?

She was of the world, worldly. It in no way disgusted her that Sir Lionel was an old rip, and that she knew him to be so. There were a great many old male rips at Littlebath and elsewhere. Miss Todd's path in life had brought her across more than one or two such. She encountered them without horror, welcomed them without shame, and spoke of them with a laugh rather than a shudder. Her idea was, that such a rip as Sir Lionel would best mend his manners by marriage ; by marriage, but not with her. She knew better than trust herself to any Sir Lionel.

And she had encountered old female rips ; that is, if dishonesty in money-dealings, selfishness, coarseness, vanity, absence of religion, and false pretences, when joined to age, may be held as

constituting an old female rip. Many such had been around her frequently. She would laugh with them, feed them, call on them, lose her money to them, and feel herself no whit degraded. Such company brought on her no conviction of shame. But yet she was not of them. Coarse she was ; but neither dishonest, nor selfish, nor vain, nor irreligious, nor false.

Such being the nature of the woman, she had not found it necessary to display any indignation when Sir Lionel made his offer ; but she did feel angry with him on Miss Baker's behalf. Why had he deceived that woman, and made an ass of himself ? Had he had any wit, any knowledge of character, he would have known what sort of an answer he was likely to get if he brought his vows and offers to the Paragon. There he had been received with no special favour. No lures had been there displayed to catch him. He had not been turned out of the house when he came there, and that was all. So now, as she put on her bonnet, she determined to punish Sir Lionel.

But in accusing her suitor of want of judgment, she was quite in the dark as to his real course of action. She little knew with how profound a judgment he was managing his affairs. Had she known, she would hardly have interfered as she now did. As she put her foot

on the step of the fly she desired her servant to drive to Montpellier Terrace.

She was shown into the drawing-room, and there she found Miss Baker and Miss Gauntlet; not our friend Adela, but Miss Penelope Gauntlet, who was now again settled in Littlebath.

‘Well, ladies,’ said Miss Todd, walking up the room with well-assured foot and full comfortable presence, ‘I’ve news to tell you.’

They both of them saw at a glance that she had news. Between Miss P. Gauntlet and Miss Todd there had never been cordiality. Miss Todd was, as we have said, of the world, worldly; whereas Miss Gauntlet was of Dr. Snort, godly. She belonged plainly to the third set of which we have spoken; Miss Todd was an amalgamation of the two first. Miss Baker, however, was a point of union, a connecting rod. There was about her a savouring of the fragrance of Ebenezer, but accompanied, it must be owned, by a whiff of brimstone. Thus these three ladies were brought together; and as it was manifest that Miss Todd had news to tell, the other two were prepared to listen.

‘What do you think, ladies?’ and she sat herself down, filling an arm-chair with her goodly person. ‘What do you think has happened to me to-day?’

‘Perhaps the doctor has been with you,’ said

Miss P. Gauntlet, not alluding to the Littlebath Galen, but meaning to insinuate that Miss Todd might have come thither to tell them of her conversion from the world.

'Better than ten doctors, my dear'—Miss Penelope drew herself up very stiffly—'or twenty! I've had an offer of marriage. What do you think of that?'

Miss P. Gauntlet looked as though she thought a great deal of it. She certainly did think that had such an accident happened to her, she would not have spoken of it with such a voice, or before such an audience. But now her face, which was always long and thin, became longer and thinner, and she sat with her mouth open, expecting further news.

Miss Baker became rather red, then rather pale, and then red again. She put out her hand, and took hold of the side of the chair in which she sat; but she said nothing. Her heart told her that that offer had been made by Sir Lionel.

'You don't wish me joy, ladies,' said Miss Todd.

'But you have not told us whether you accepted it,' said Miss Penelope.

'Ha! ha! ha! No, that's the worst of it. No, I didn't accept it. But, upon my word, it was made.'

Then it was not Sir Lionel, thought Miss

Baker, releasing her hold of the chair, and feeling that the blood about her heart was again circulating.

‘And is that all that we are to know?’ asked Miss Penelope.

‘Oh, my dears, you shall know it all. I told my lover that I should keep no secrets. But, come, you shall guess. Who was it, Miss Baker?’

‘I couldn’t say at all,’ said Miss Baker, in a faint voice.

‘Perhaps Mr. O’Callaghan,’ suggested Miss Penelope, conscious, probably, that an ardent young evangelical clergyman is generally in want of an income.

‘Mr. O’Callaghan!’ shouted Miss Todd, throwing up her head with scorn. ‘Pho! The gentleman I speak of would have made me a lady. Lady ——! Now who do you think it was, Miss Baker?’

‘Oh, I couldn’t guess at all,’ said poor Miss Baker. But she now knew that it was Sir Lionel. It might have been worse, however, and that she felt—much worse!

‘Was it Sir Lionel Bertram?’ asked the other.

‘Ah! Miss Gauntlet, you know all about the gentlemen of Littlebath. I can see that. It was Sir Lionel. Wasn’t that a triumph?’

‘And you refused him?’ asked Miss Penelope.

‘ Of course I did. You don’t mean to say that you think I would have accepted him ?’

To this Miss Penelope made no answer. Her opinions were of a mixed sort. She partly misbelieved Miss Todd—partly wondered at her. Unmarried ladies of a certain age, whatever may be their own feelings in regard to matrimony on their own behalf, seem always impressed with a conviction that other ladies in the same condition would certainly marry if they got an opportunity. Miss Penelope could not believe that Miss Todd had rejected Sir Lionel ; but at the same time she could not but be startled also by the great fact of such a rejection. At any rate her course of duty was open. Littlebath should be enlightened on the subject before the drawing-room candles were lit that evening ; or at any rate that set in Littlebath to which she belonged. So she rose from her chair, and, declaring that she had sat an unconscionable time with Miss Baker, departed, diligent, about her work.

‘ Well, what do you think of that, my dear ?’ said Miss Todd, as soon as the two of them were left alone.

It was strange that Miss Todd, who was ordinarily so good-natured, who was so especially intent on being good-natured to Miss Baker, should have thus roughly communicated to her friend tidings which were sure to wound. But

she had omitted to look at it in this light. Her intention had been to punish Sir Lionel for having been so grossly false and grossly foolish. She had seen through him—at least, hardly through him ; had seen at least that he must have been doubting between the two ladies, and that he had given up the one whom he believed to be the poorer. She did not imagine it possible that, after having offered to her, he should then go with a similar offer to Miss Baker. Had such an idea arisen in her mind, she would certainly have allowed Miss Baker to take her chance of promotion unmolested.

Miss Baker gave a long sigh. Now that Miss Gauntlet was gone she felt herself better able to speak ; but, nevertheless, any speech on the subject was difficult to her. Her kind heart at once forgave Miss Todd. There could now be no marriage between that false one and her friend ; and therefore, if the ice would only get itself broken, she would not be unwilling to converse upon the subject. But how to break the ice !

‘ I always thought he would,’ at last she said.

‘ Did you ?’ said Miss Todd. ‘ Well, he certainly used to come there, but I never knew why. Sometimes I thought it was to talk about you.’

‘ Oh, no !’ said Miss Baker, plaintively.

‘ I gave him no encouragement—none what-

ever ;—used to send him here and there—anything to get rid of him. Sometimes I thought—’ and then Miss Todd hesitated.

‘Thought what?’ asked Miss Baker.

‘Well, I don’t want to be ill-natured ; but sometimes I thought that he wanted to borrow money, and didn’t exactly know how to begin.’

‘To borrow money !’ He had once borrowed money from Miss Baker.

‘Well, I don’t know ; I only say I thought so. He never did.’

Miss Baker sighed again, and then there was a slight pause in the conversation.

‘But, Miss Todd—’

‘Well, my dear !’

‘Do you think that—’

‘Think what ? Speak out, my dear ; you may before me. If you’ve got any secret, I’ll keep it.’

‘Oh ! I’ve got no secret ; only this. Do you think that Sir Lionel is—is poor—that he should want to borrow money ?’

‘Well ; poor ! I hardly know what you call poor. But we all know that he is a distressed man. I suppose he has a good income, and a little ready money would, perhaps, set him up ; but there’s no doubt about his being over head and ears in debt, I suppose.’

This seemed to throw a new and unexpected

light on Miss Baker's mind. 'I thought he *was* always so very respectable,' said she.

'Hum-m-m!' said Miss Todd, who knew the world.

'Eh?' said Miss Baker, who did not.

'It depends on what one means by respectable,' said Miss Todd.

'I really thought he was so very—'

'Hum-m-m-m,' repeated Miss Todd, shaking her head.

And then there was a little conversation carried on between these ladies so entirely *sotto voce* that the reporter of this scene was unable to hear a word of it. But this he could see, that Miss Todd bore by far the greater part in it.

At the end of it, Miss Baker gave another, and a longer, and a deeper sigh. 'But you know, my dear,' said Miss Todd, in her most consolatory voice, and these words were distinctly audible, 'nothing does a man of that sort so much good as marrying.'

'Does it?' asked Miss Baker.

'Certainly; if his wife knows how to manage him.'

And then Miss Todd departed, leaving Miss Baker with much work for her thoughts. Her female friend Miss Baker had quite forgiven; but she felt that she could never quite forgive him. 'To have deceived me so!' she said to

herself, recurring to her old idea of his great respectability. But, nevertheless, it was probably his other sin that rankled deepest in her mind.

Of Miss Baker it may be said that she had hardly touched the pitch ; at any rate, that it had not defiled her.

Sir Lionel was somewhat ill at ease as he walked from the Paragon to his livery stables. He had certainly looked upon success with Miss Todd as by no means sure ; but, nevertheless, he was disappointed. Let any of us, in any attempt that we may make, convince ourselves with ever so much firmness that we shall fail, yet we are hardly the less down-hearted when the failure comes. We assure ourselves that we are not sanguine, but we assure ourselves falsely. It is man's nature to be sanguine ; his nature, and perhaps his greatest privilege.

And Sir Lionel, as he walked along, began to fear that his own scruples would now stand in the way of that other marriage—of that second string to his bow. When, in making his little private arrangements within his own mind, he had decided that if Miss Todd rejected him he would forthwith walk off to Miss Baker, it never occurred to him that his own feelings would militate against such a proceeding. But such was now absolutely the fact. Having talked about 'dear Sarah,' he found that even he would

have a difficulty in bringing himself to the utterance of ‘dear Mary.’

He went to bed, however, that night with the comfortable reflection that any such nonsense would be dissipated by the morning. But when the morning came—his morning, one P. M.—his feeling he found was the same. He could not see Miss Baker that day.

He was disgusted and disappointed with himself. He had flattered himself that he was gifted with greater firmness; and now that he found himself so wanting in strength of character, he fretted and fumed, as men will do, even at their own faults. He swore to himself that he would go to-morrow, and that evening went to bed early, trying to persuade himself that indigestion had weakened him. He did great injustice, however, to as fine a set of internal organs as ever blessed a man of sixty.

At two o’clock next day he dressed himself for the campaign in Montpellier Terrace; but when dressed he was again disorganised. He found that he could not do it. He told himself over and over again that with Miss Baker there need be no doubt; she, at least, would accept him. He had only to smile there, and she would smile again. He had only to say ‘dear Mary,’ and those soft eyes would be turned to the ground and the battle would be won.

But still he could not do it. He was sick ; he was ill ; he could not eat his breakfast. He looked in the glass, and found himself to be yellow, and wrinkled, and wizened. He was not half himself. There were yet three weeks before Miss Baker would leave Littlebath. It was on the whole better that his little arrangement should be made immediately previous to her departure. He would leave Littlebath for ten days, and return a new man. So he went up to London, and bestowed his time upon his son.

At the end of the ten days much of his repugnance had worn off. But still the sound of that word ‘Sarah,’ and the peal of laughter which followed, rang in his ears. That utterance of the verbiage of love is a disagreeable task for a gentleman of his years. He had tried it, and found it very disagreeable. He would save himself a repetition of the nuisance and write to her.

He did so. His letter was not very long. He said nothing about ‘Mary’ in it, but contented himself with calling her his dearest friend. A few words were sufficient to make her understand what he meant, and those few words were there. He merely added a caution, that for both their sakes, the matter had better not at present be mentioned to anybody.

Miss Baker, when she received this letter, had almost recovered her equanimity. Hers had

been a soft and gentle sorrow. She had had no fits of bursting grief; her wailings had been neither loud nor hysterical. A gentle, soft, faint tinge of melancholy had come upon her; so that she had sighed much as she sat at her solitary tea, and had allowed her novel to fall uncared for to the ground. ‘Would it not be well for her,’ she said to herself more than once, ‘to go to Hadley? Would not any change be well for her?’ She felt now that Caroline’s absence was a heavy blow to her, and that it would be well that she should leave Littlebath. It was astonishing how this affair of Miss Todd’s reconciled her to her future home.

And then, when she was thus tranquil, thus resigned, thus all but happy, came this tremendous letter, upsetting her peace of mind, and throwing her into a new maze of difficulties.

She had never said to herself at any time that if Sir Lionel did propose she would accept him. She had never questioned herself as to the probability of such an event. That she would have accepted him a fortnight ago, there can be no doubt; but what was she to do now?

It was not only that Sir Lionel had made another tender of his hand to another lady ten or twelve days since, but to this must be added the fact that all Littlebath knew that he had done so. Miss Todd, after the first ebullition of

her comic spleen, had not said much about it; but Miss P. Gauntlet's tongue had not been idle. She, perhaps, had told it only to the godly; but the godly, let them be ever so exclusive, must have some intercourse with the wicked world; and thus every lady in Littlebath now knew all about it. And then there were other difficulties. That whispered conversation still rang in her ears. She was not quite sure how far it might be her mission to reclaim such a man as Sir Lionel—this new Sir Lionel whom Miss Todd had described. And then, too, he was in want of money. Why, she was in want of money herself!

But was there not something also to be said on the other side? It is reported that unmarried ladies such as Miss Baker generally regret the forlornness of their own condition.. If so, the fault is not their own, but must be attributed to the social system to which they belong. The English world is pleased to say that an unmarried lady past forty has missed her hit in life —has omitted to take her tide at the ebb; and what can unmarried ladies do but yield to the world's dictum? That the English world may become better informed, and learn as speedily as may be to speak with more sense on the subject, let us all pray.

But, in the meantime, the world's dictum was strong at Littlebath, and did influence this dear

lady. She would prefer the name of Lady Bertram to that of Miss Baker for the remainder of the term of years allotted to her. It would please her to walk into a room as a married woman, and to quit herself of that disgrace, which injustice and prejudice, and the folly of her own sex rather than of the other, had so cruelly attached to her present position. And then, to be *Lady Bertram*! There were but few angels at this time in Littlebath, and Miss Baker was not one of them : she had a taint of vanity in her composition ; but we doubt if such female vanity could exist in any human breast in a more pardonable form than it did in hers.

And then, perhaps, this plan of marrying might have the wished-for effect on Sir Lionel's way of living ;—and how desirable was this ! Would it not be a splendid work for her to reclaim a lost colonel ? Might it not be her duty to marry him with this special object ?

There certainly did appear to be some difficulty as to money. If, as Miss Todd assured her, Sir Lionel were really in difficulties, her own present annuity—all that she could absolutely call her own—her one hundred and eighty-nine pounds, seventeen shillings and threepence per annum—would not help them much. Sir Lionel was at any rate disinterested in his offer ; that at least was clear to her.

And then a sudden light broke in upon her meditations. Sir Lionel and the old gentleman were at variance. We allude to the old gentleman at Hadley : with the other old gentleman, of whom we wot, it may be presumed that Sir Lionel was on tolerably favourable terms. Might not she be the means of bringing the two brothers together ? If she were Lady Bertram, would not the old gentleman receive Sir Lionel back to his bosom for her sake—to his bosom, and also to his purse ? But before she took any step in the dark, she resolved to ask the old gentleman the question.

It is true that Sir Lionel had desired her to speak to no person on the subject ; but that injunction of course referred to strangers. It could not but be expected that on such a matter she should consult her best friends. Sir Lionel had also enjoined a speedy answer ; and in order that she might not disappoint him in this matter, she resolved to put the question at once to Mr. Bertram. Great measures require great means. She would herself go to Hadley on the morrow—and so she wrote a letter that night, to beg that her uncle would expect her.

‘ So ; you got tired of Littlebath before the month was out ? ’ said he.

‘ Oh ! but I am going back again.’

‘ Going back again ! Then why the d—— have

you come up now ?' Alas ! it was too clear that the old gentleman was not in one of his more pacific moods.

As these words were spoken, Miss Baker was still standing in the passage, that she might see her box brought in from the fly. She of course had on her bonnet, and thickest shawl, and cloak. She had thick boots on also, and an umbrella in her hand. The maid was in the passage, and so was the man who had driven her. She was very cold, and her nose was blue, and her teeth chattered. She could not tell her tale of love in such guise, or to such audience.

' What the d—— has brought you up ?' repeated the old gentleman, standing with his two sticks at the sitting-room door. He did not care who heard him, or how cold it was, or of what nature might be her present mission. He knew that an extra journey from Littlebath to London and back, flys and porters included, would cost two pounds ten shillings. He knew, or thought that he knew, that this might have been avoided. He also knew that his rheumatism plagued him, that his old bones were sore, that he could not sleep at night, that he could not get into the city to see how things went, and that the grave was claiming him. It was not surprising that the old gentleman should be cross.

'I'll tell you if you'll let me come into the room,' said Miss Baker. 'Take the box upstairs, Mary. Half a crown! oh no, two shillings will be quite enough.' This economy was assumed to pacify the old gentleman; but it did not have the desired effect. 'One and sixpence,' he hollered out from his crutches. 'Don't give him a halfpenny more.'

'Please, sir, the luggage, sir,' said the fly-driver.

'Luggage!' shouted the old man. His limbs were impotent, but his voice was not; and the fly-driver shook in his shoes.

'There,' said Miss Baker, insidiously giving the man two and threepence. 'I shall not give you a farthing more.' It is to be feared that she intended her uncle to think that his limit had not been exceeded.

And then she was alone with Mr. Bertram. Her nose was still blue, and her toes still cold; but at any rate she was alone with him. It was hard for her to tell her tale; and she thoroughly wished herself back at Littlebath; but, nevertheless, she did tell it. The courage of women in some conditions of life surpasses anything that man can do.

'I want to consult you about that,' said she, producing Sir Lionel's letter.

The old gentleman took it, and looked at it,

and turned it. ‘What! it’s from that swindler, is it?’ said he.

‘It’s from Sir Lionel,’ said Miss Baker, trembling. There were as yet no promising auspices for the fraternal reconciliation.

‘Yes; I see who it’s from—and what is it all about? I shan’t read it. You can tell me, I suppose, what’s in it.’

‘I had hoped that perhaps, sir, you and he might—’

‘Might what?’

‘Be brought together as brothers and friends.’

‘Brothers and friends! One can’t choose one’s brother; but who would choose to be the friend of a swindler? Is that what the letter is about?’

‘Not exactly that, Mr. Bertram.’

‘Then what the d—— is it?’

‘Sir Lionel, sir, has made me—’

‘Made you what? Put your name to a bill, I suppose.’

‘No; indeed he has not. Nothing of that kind.’

‘Then what has he made you do?’

‘He has not made me do anything; but he has sent me—an—an offer of marriage.’ And poor Miss Baker, with her blue nose, looked up so innocently, so imploringly, so trustingly, that any one but Mr. Bertram would have comforted her.

'An offer of marriage from Sir Lionel!' said he.

'Yes,' said Miss Baker, timidly. 'Here it is; and I have come up to consult you about the answer.' Mr. Bertram now did take the letter, and did read it through.

'Well!' he said, closing his eyes and shaking his head gently. 'Well!'

'I thought it better to do nothing without seeing you. And that is what has brought me to Hadley in such a hurry.'

'The audacious, impudent scoundrel!'

'You think, then, that I should refuse him?'

'You are a fool, an ass! a downright old soft-headed fool!' Such was the old gentleman's answer to her question.

'But I didn't know what to say without consulting you,' said Miss Baker, with her handkerchief to her face.

'Not know! Don't you know that he's a swindler, a reprobate, a penniless adventurer? Good heavens! And you are such a fool as that! It's well that you are not to be left at Littlebath by yourself.'

Miss Baker made no attempt to defend herself, but, bursting into tears, assured her uncle that she would be guided by him. Under his absolute dictation she wrote the enclosed short answer to Sir Lionel.

‘ Hadley, January —, 184—.

‘ Dear Sir,

‘ Mr. Bertram says that it will be sufficient to let you know that he would not give me a penny during his life, or leave me a penny at his death if I were to become your wife.

‘ Yours truly,

‘ MARY BAKER.’

That was all that the old gentleman would allow ; but as she folded the letter, she surreptitiously added the slightest imaginable postscript to explain the matter—such words as occurred to her at the spur of the moment.

‘ He is so angry about it all !’

After that Miss Baker was not allowed back to Littlebath, even to pack up or pay her bills, or say good-bye to those she left behind. The servant had to do it all. Reflecting on the danger which had been surmounted, Mr. Bertram determined that she should not again be put in the way of temptation.

And this was the end of Sir Lionel’s wooing.

CHAPTER III.

A QUIET LITTLE DINNER.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT was married and took his bride to Paris and Nice ; and Sir Lionel Bertram tried to get married, but his bride—bride as he hoped her to have been—ran away by herself to Hadley. In the meantime George Bertram lived alone in his dark dull chambers in London.

He would fain have been all alone ; but at what was perhaps the worst moment of his misery, his father came to him. It may be remembered how anxiously he had longed to know his father when he first commenced that journey to Jerusalem, how soon he became attached to him, how fascinated he had been by Sir Lionel's manners, how easily he forgave the first little traits of un-paternal conduct on his father's part, how gradually the truth forced itself upon his mind. But now, at this time, the truth had forced itself on his mind. He knew his father for what he was.

And his mind was not one which could reject such knowledge, or alter the nature of it because the man was his father. There are those to whom a father's sins, or a husband's sins, or a brother's sins are no sins at all. And of such one may say, that though we must of compulsion find their judgment to be in some sort delinquent, that their hearts more than make up for such delinquency. One knows that they are wrong, but can hardly wish them to be less so.

But George Bertram was not one of them : he had been in no hurry to condemn his father ; but, having seen his sins, he knew them for sins, and did condemn them. He found that his uncle had been right, and that Sir Lionel was a man whom he could in no wise respect, and could hardly love. Money he perceived was his father's desire. He would therefore give him what money he could spare ; but he would not give him his society.

When, therefore, Sir Lionel announced his arrival in town and his intention to remain there some little time, George Bertram was by no means solaced in his misery. In those days he was very miserable. It was only now that he knew how thoroughly he loved this woman—now that she was so utterly beyond his reach. Weak and wavering as he was in many things, he was not weak enough to abandon himself altogether

to unavailing sorrow. He knew that work alone could preserve him from sinking—hard, constant, unflinching work, that one great cure for all our sorrow, that only means of adapting ourselves to God's providences.

So he set himself to work—not a lazy, listless reading of counted pages; not history at two volumes a week, or science at a treatise a day; but to such true work as he found it in him to do, working with all his mind and all his strength. He had already written and was known as a writer; but he had written under impulse, carelessly, without due regard to his words or due thought as to his conclusions. He had written things of which he was already ashamed, and had put forth with the *ex cathedra* air of an established master ideas which had already ceased to be his own. But all that should be altered now. Then he had wanted a quick return for his writing. It had piqued him to think that the names of others, his contemporaries, were bruited about the world, but that the world knew nothing of his own. Harcourt was already a noted man, while he himself had done no more than attempted and abandoned a profession. Harcourt's early success had made him an early author; but he already felt that his authorship was unavailing. Harcourt's success had been solid, stable, such as men delight in; his had as yet resulted only in his

all but forced withdrawal from the only respectable position which he had achieved.

And now Harcourt's success was again before him. Harcourt had now as his own that which he had looked to as the goal of all his success, the worldly reward for which he had been willing to work. And yet what was Harcourt as compared with him? He knew himself to be of a higher temperament, of a brighter genius, of greater powers. He would not condescend even to compare himself to this man who had so thoroughly distanced him in the world's race.

Thinking, and feeling, and suffering thus, he had begun to work with all the vehemence of which he was master. He would ask for no speedy return now. His first object was to deaden the present misery of his mind; and then, if it might be so, to vindicate his claim to be regarded as one of England's worthy children, letting such vindication come in its own time.

Such being the state of his mind, his father's arrival did not contribute much to his comfort. Sir Lionel was rather petulant when he was with him; objected to him that he had played his cards badly; would talk about Caroline, and, which was almost worse, about the solicitor-general; constantly urged him to make overtures of reconciliation to his uncle; and wanted one day five pounds, on another ten pounds, and

again on a third fifteen pounds. At this moment George's fixed income was but two hundred pounds a year, and any other wealth of which he was possessed was the remainder of his uncle's thousand pounds. When that was gone, he must either live on his income, small as it was, or write for the booksellers. Such being the case, he felt himself obliged to decline when the fifteen pounds was mentioned.

'You can let me have it for a couple of months?' said Sir Lionel.

'Not conveniently,' said his son.

'I will send it you back immediately on my return to Littlebath,' said the father; 'so if you have got it by you, pray oblige me.'

'I certainly have got it,' said the son—and he handed him the desired check; 'but I think you should remember, sir, how very small my income is, and that there is no prospect of its being increased.'

'It must be altogether your own fault then,' said the colonel, pocketing the money. 'I never knew a young man who had a finer hand of cards put into his hand—never; if you have played it badly, it is your own fault, altogether your own fault.' In truth, Sir Lionel did really feel that his son had used him badly, and owed him some amends. Had George but done his duty, he might now have been the actual recognized heir.

of his uncle's wealth, and the actual possessor of as much as would have been allowed to a dutiful, obedient son. To a man of Sir Lionel's temperament, it was annoying that there should be so much wealth so near him, and yet absolutely, and, alas! probably for ever out of his reach.

Sir Lionel had resolved to wait in London for his answer, and there he received it. Short as was poor Miss Baker's letter, it was quite sufficiently explicit. She had betrayed him to the old gentleman, and after that all hopes of money from that source were over. It might still be possible for him to talk over Miss Baker, but such triumph would be but barren. Miss Baker with a transferred allegiance—transferred from the old gentleman to him—would be but a very indifferent helpmate. He learnt, however, from Littlebath that she was still away, and would probably not return. Then he went back in fancied security, and found himself the centre of all those amatory ovations which Miss Todd and Miss Gauntlet had prepared for him.

It was about two months after this that George Bertram saw Sir Henry Harcourt for the first time after the marriage. He had heard that Sir Henry was in town, had heard of the blaze of their new house in Eaton Square, had seen in the papers how magnificently Lady Har-

court had appeared at court, how well she graced her brilliant home, how fortunate the world esteemed that young lawyer who, having genius, industry, and position of his own, had now taken to himself in marriage beauty, wealth, and social charms. All this George Bertram heard and read, and hearing it and reading it had kept himself from the paths in which such petted children of fortune might probably be met.

Twice in the course of these two months did Sir Henry call at Bertram's chambers; but Bertram was now at home to no one. He lived in a great desert, in which was no living being but himself—in a huge desert without water and without grass, in which there was no green thing. He was alone; to one person only had he spoken of his misery; once only had he thought of escaping from it. That thought had been in vain: that companion was beyond his reach; and, therefore, living there in his London chambers, he had been all alone.

But at last they did meet. Sir Henry, determined not to be beaten in his attempt to effect a reconciliation, wrote to him, saying that he would call, and naming an hour. ‘Caroline and you,’ he said, ‘are cousins; there can be no reason why you should be enemies. For her sake, if not for mine, do oblige me in this.’

Bertram sat for hours with that note beneath

his eyes before he could bring himself to answer it. Could it really be that she desired to see him again? That she, in her splendour and first glow of prosperous joy, would wish to encounter him in his dreary, sad, deserted misery? And why could she wish it? and, ah! how could she wish it?

And then he asked himself whether he also would wish to see her. That he still loved her, loved her as he never had done while she was yet his own, he had often told himself. That he could never be at rest till he had ceased to make her the first object of his thoughts he had said as often. That he ought not to see her, he knew full well. The controversy within his own bosom was carried on for two hours, and then he wrote to Sir Henry, saying that he would be at his chambers at the hour named. From that moment the salutary effort was discontinued, the work was put aside, and the good that had been done was all revoked.

Sir Henry came, true to his appointment. Whatever might be his object, he was energetic in it. He was now a man of many concerns; hours were scanty with him, and a day much too short. The calls of clients, and the calls of party, joined to those other calls which society makes upon men in such brilliant stations, hardly left him time for sleeping; but not the

less urgent was he in his resolve to see his beaten rival who would so willingly have left him to his brilliant joy. But was not all this explained long even before Christianity was in vogue? ‘*Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*’ Whom God will confound, those he first maddens.

Nothing could exceed the bland friendship, the winning manners, and the frank courtesy of Sir Henry. He said but little about what was past; but that little went to show that he had been blessed with the hand of Caroline Waddington only because Bertram had rejected that blessing as not worthy his acceptance. Great man as he was, he almost humbled himself before Bertram’s talent. He spoke of their mutual connection at Hadley as though they two were his heirs of right, and as though their rights were equal; and then he ended by begging that they might still be friends.

‘Our careers must be widely different,’ said Bertram, somewhat touched by his tone; ‘yours will be in the light; mine must be in the dark.’

‘Most men who do any good live in the dark for some period of their lives,’ said Harcourt. ‘I, too, have had my dark days, and doubtless shall have them again; but neither with you nor with me will they endure long.’

Bertram thought that Harcourt knew nothing about it, and sneered when the successful man talked of his dark days. What darkness had his mental eyesight ever known? We are all apt to think when our days are dark that there is no darkness so dark as our own.

'I know what your feelings are,' continued Sir Henry; 'and I hope you will forgive me if I speak openly. You have resolved not to meet Caroline. My object is to make you put aside that resolve. It is my object and hers also. It is out of the question that you should continue to avoid the world. Your walk in life will be that of a literary man: but nowadays literary men become senators and statesmen. They have high rank, are well paid, and hold their own boldly against men of meaner capacities. This is the career that we both foresee for you; and in that career we both hope to be your friends.'

So spoke the great advocate with suasive eloquence—with eloquence dangerously suasive as regarded his own happiness. But in truth this man knew not what love meant—not that love which those two wretched lovers understood so well. That his own wife was cold to him, cold as ice—that he well knew. That Bertram had flung her from him because she had been cold to him—that he believed. That he himself could live without any passionate love—that he

acknowledged. His wife was graceful and very beautiful—all the world confessed that. And thus Sir Henry was contented. Those honeymoon days had indeed been rather dreary. Once or twice before that labour was over he had been almost tempted to tell her that he had paid too high for the privilege of pressing such an icicle to his bosom. But he had restrained himself; and now in the blaze of the London season, passing his mornings in courts of law and his evenings in the House of Parliament, he flattered himself that he was a happy man.

‘Come and dine with us in a quiet way the day after to-morrow,’ said Sir Henry, ‘and then the ice will be broken.’ George Bertram said that he would; and from that moment his studies were at an end.

This occurred on the Monday. The invitation was for the following Wednesday. Sir Henry explained that from some special cause he would be relieved from parliamentary attendance, at any rate till ten o’clock; that at the quiet dinner there would be no other guests except Mr. and Mrs. Stistick, and Baron Brawl, whose wife and family were not yet in town.

‘You’ll like the baron,’ said Harcourt; ‘he’s loud and arrogant, no doubt; but he’s not loud and arrogant about nothing, as some men are. Stistick is a bore. Of course you know him.

'He's member for Peterloo, and goes with us on condition that somebody listens to him about once a week. But the baron will put him down.'

'And Mrs. Stistick?' said George.

'I never heard of her till yesterday, and Caroline has gone to call on her to-day. It's rather a bore for her, for they live somewhere half-way to Harrow, I believe. Half-past seven. Good-bye, old fellow. I ought to have been before Baron Brawl at Westminster twenty minutes since. And so the solicitor-general, rushing out from the Temple, threw himself into a cab; and as the wheels rattled along the Strand, he made himself acquainted with the contents of his brief.'

Why should Caroline have expressed a wish to see him? That was the thought that chiefly rested in Bertram's mind when Sir Henry left him. Why should it be an object to her to force a meeting between her and him? Would it not be better for them both that they should be far as the poles asunder?

'Well,' he said to himself, 'if it be no difficulty to her, neither shall it be a difficulty to me. She is strong-minded, and I will be so no less. I will go and meet her. It is but the first plunge that gives the shock.'

And thus he closed his work, and sat moodily

thinking. He was angry with her in that she could endure to see him ; but, alas ! half-pleased also that she should wish to do so. He had no thought, no most distant thought, that she could ever now be more to him than the wife of an acquaintance whom he did not love too well. But yet there was in his heart some fragment of half-satisfied vanity at hearing that she did look forward to see him once again.

And how shall we speak of such a wish on her part ? ‘Caroline,’ her husband had said to her at breakfast, ‘it will be all nonsense for you and George Bertram to keep up any kind of quarrel. I hate nonsense of that sort.’

‘There is no quarrel between us,’ she replied.

‘There ought to be none ; and I shall get him to come here.’

The colour of her face became slightly heightened as she answered : ‘If you wish it, Sir Henry, and he wishes it also, I shall not object.’

‘I do wish it, certainly. I think it absolutely necessary as regards my position with your grandfather.’

‘Do just as you think best,’ said his wife. Twas thus that Lady Harcourt had expressed her desire to see George Bertram at her house. Had he known the truth, that fragment of half-satisfied vanity would have been but small.

In those early days of her marriage, Lady Harcourt bore her triumphs very placidly. She showed no great elation at the change that had come over her life. Her aunt from Hadley was frequently with her, and wondered to find her so little altered, or rather, in some respects, so much altered; for she was more considerate in her manner, more sparing of her speech, much less inclined to domineer now, as Lady Harcourt, than in former days she had ever been as Caroline Waddington. She went constantly into society, and was always much considered; but her triumphs were mainly of that quiet nature which one sometimes sees to be achieved with so little effort by beautiful women. It seemed but necessary that she should sit still, and sometimes smile, and the world was ready to throw itself at her feet. Nay, the smile was but too often omitted, and yet the world was there.

At home, though more employed, she was hardly more energetic. Her husband told her that he wished his house to be noted for the pleasantness of his dinner-parties, and, therefore, she studied the subject as a good child would study a lesson. She taught herself what the material of a dinner should be, she satisfied herself that her cook was good, she looked to the brilliancy of her appointments, and did her best to make the house shine brightly. The house did

shine, and on the whole Sir Henry was contented. It was true that his wife did not talk much ; but what little she did say was said with a sweet manner and with perfect grace. She was always dressed with care, was always beautiful, was always ladylike. Had not Sir Henry reason to be contented ? As for talking, he could do that himself.

And now that she was told that George Bertram was to come to her house, she did not show much more excitement at the tidings than at the promised advent of Mr. Baron Brawl. She took the matter with such indifference that Sir Henry, at least, had no cause for jealousy. But then she was indifferent about everything. Nothing seemed to wake her either to joy or sorrow. Sir Henry, perhaps, was contented ; but lovely, lady-like, attractive as she was, he sometimes did feel almost curious to know whether it were possible to rouse this doll of his to any sense of life or animation. He had thought, nay, almost wished, that the name of her old lover would have moved her, that the idea of seeing him would have disturbed her. But, no ; one name was the same to her as another. She had been told to go and call on Mrs. Stistick, and she had gone. She was told to receive Mr. Bertram, and she was quite ready to do so. Angels from heaven, or spirits from below, could Sir Henry have summoned

such to his table, would have been received by her with equal equanimity. This was dutiful on her part, and naturally satisfactory to a husband inclined to be somewhat exigeant. But even duty may pall on an exigeant husband, and a man may be brought to wish that his wife would cross him.

But on this occasion Sir Henry had no such pleasure. ‘I saw Bertram this morning,’ he said, when he went home for five minutes before taking his seat in the House for the night. ‘He’s to be here on Wednesday.’

‘Oh, very well. There will be six, then.’ She said no more. It was clear that the dinner, and that only, was on her mind. He had told her to be careful about his dinners, and therefore could not complain. But, nevertheless, he was almost vexed. Don’t let any wife think that she will satisfy her husband by perfect obedience. Overmuch virtue in one’s neighbours is never satisfactory to us sinners.

But there were moments in which Lady Harcourt could think of her present life, when no eye was by to watch her—no master there to wonder at her perfections. Moments! nay, but there were hours, and hours, and hours. There were crowds of hours; slow, dull, lingering hours, in which she had no choice but to think of it. A woman may see to her husband’s dinners and her

own toilet, and yet have too much time for thinking. It would almost have been a comfort to Lady Harcourt if Sir Henry could have had a dinner-party every day.

How should she bear herself; what should she say; how should she look when George Bertram came there as a guest to her house? How could he be so cruel, so heartless, so inhuman as to come there? Her path was difficult enough for her poor weary feet. He must know that—should, at any rate, have known it. How could he be so cruel as to add this great stumbling-block to her other perils?

The Wednesday came, and at half-past seven she was in her drawing-room as beautiful and as dignified as ever. She had a peculiar place of her own in the corner of a peculiar sofa, and there she lived. It was her goddess' shrine, and her worshippers came and did reverence before her. None came and sat beside her. Hers was not that gentle fascination which entices men, and women too, to a near proximity. Her bow was very gracious, and said much; but 'noli me tangere' was part of its eloquence. And so Baron Brawl found, when on entering her drawing-room he told her that the fame of her charms had reached his ears, and that he was delighted to have an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

Mr. and Mrs. Stistick were the next comers. Mrs. Stistick sat herself down on an opposite sofa, and seemed to think that she did her duty to society by sitting there. And so she did. Only permit her so to sit, and there was no further labour in entertaining Mrs. Stistick. She was a large, heavy woman, with a square forehead and a square chin, and she had brought up seven children most successfully. Now, in these days of her husband's parliamentary prosperity, she was carried about to dinners; and in her way she enjoyed them. She was not too shy to eat, and had no wish whatever either to be talked to or to talk. To sit easily on a sofa and listen to the buzz of voices was life and society to her. Perhaps in those long hours she was meditating on her children's frocks or her husband's linen. But they never seemed to be long to her.

Mr. Stistick was standing on the rug before the fire, preparing for his first onslaught on Baron Brawl, when the servant announced Mr. Bertram.

‘Ah! Bertram, I’m delighted to see you,’ said Sir Henry;—‘doubly so, as dinner is ready. Judge, you know my friend Bertram, by name, at any rate?’ and some sort of half-introduction was performed.

‘He who moved all Oxford from its propriety?’

said the baron. But Bertram neither saw him nor heard him. Neither his eyes nor his ears were at his command.

As he took his host's proffered hand, he glanced his eyes for a moment round the room. There she sat, and he had to speak to her as best he might. At his last interview with her he had spoken freely enough, and it all rushed now upon his mind. Then how little he had made of her; how lightly he had esteemed her! Now, as she sat there before him his spirit acknowledged her as a goddess, and he all but feared to address her. His face, he knew, was hot and red; his manner, he felt, was awkward. He was not master of himself, and when such is the case with a man, the fact always betrays itself.

But he did speak to her. 'How do you do, Lady Harcourt?' he said, and he put his hand out, and he felt the ends of her fingers once more within his own.

And she spoke too, probably. But pretty women can say almost as much as is necessary on such occasions as this without opening their lips. Whether she spoke, or whether she did not, it was the same to him. He certainly did not hear her. But her fingers did touch his hand, her eyes did rest upon his face; and then, in that moment of time, he thought of Jerusalem, of the Mount of Olives, of those rides

at Littlebath, and of that last meeting, when all, all had been shattered to pieces.

'There are five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children between the ages of nine and twelve,' said Mr. Stistick, pursuing some wondrous line of argument, as Bertram turned himself towards the fire.

'What a fine national family!' said the baron.
'And how ashamed I feel when I bethink myself that only one of them is mine!'

'Dinner is served,' said the butler.

'Mrs. Stistick, will you allow me?' said Sir Henry. And then in half a minute Bertram found himself walking down to dinner with the member of Parliament. 'And we have school accommodation for just one hundred and fourteen,' continued that gentleman on the stairs. 'Now, will you tell me what becomes of the other four hundred and forty-one?'

Bertram was not at that moment in a condition to give him any information on the subject.

'I can tell you about the one,' said the baron, as Sir Henry began his grace.

'An odd thousand is nothing,' said Mr. Stistick, pausing for a second till the grace was over.

The judge and Mr. Stistick sat at Lady Harcourt's right and left, so that Bertram was not

called upon to say much to her during dinner. The judge talked incessantly, and so did the member of Parliament, and so also did the solicitor-general. A party of six is always a talking party. Men and women are not formed into pairs, and do not therefore become dumb. Each person's voice makes another person emulous, and the difficulty felt is not as to what one shall say, but how one shall get it in. Ten, and twelve, and fourteen are the silent numbers.

Every now and again Harcourt endeavoured to make Bertram join in the conversation ; and Bertram did make some faint attempts. He essayed to answer some of Mr. Stistick's very difficult inquiries, and was even roused to parry some raillery from the judge. But he was not himself ; and Caroline, who could not but watch him narrowly as she sat there in her silent beauty, saw that he was not so. She arraigned him in her mind for want of courage ; but had he been happy, and noisy, and light of heart, she would probably have arraigned him for some deeper sin.

‘ As long as the matter is left in the hands of the parents, nothing on earth will be done,’ said Mr. Stistick.

‘ That’s what I have always said to Lady Brawl,’ said the judge.

‘And it’s what I have said to Lord John ; and what I intend to say to him again. Lord John is all very well—’

‘Thank you, Stistick. I am glad, at any rate, to get as much as that from you,’ said the solicitor.

‘Lord John is all very well,’ continued the member, not altogether liking the interruption ; ‘but there is only one man in the country who thoroughly understands the subject, and who is able—’

‘And I don’t see the slightest probability of finding a second,’ said the judge.

‘And who is able to make himself heard.’

‘What do you say, Lady Harcourt,’ asked the baron, ‘as to the management of a school with —how many millions of them, Mr. Stistick ?’

‘Five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children—’

‘Suppose we say boys,’ said the judge.

‘Boys?’ asked Mr. Stistick, not quite understanding him, but rather disconcerted by the familiarity of the word.

‘Well, I suppose they must be boys ;—at least the most of them.’

‘They are all from nine to twelve, I say,’ continued Mr. Stistick, completely bewildered.

‘Oh, that alters the question,’ said the judge.

'Not at all,' said Mr. Stistick. There is accommodation for only—'

'Well, we'll ask Lady Harcourt. What do you say, Lady Harcourt?'

Lady Harcourt felt herself by no means inclined to enter into the joke on either side; so she said, with her gravest smile, 'I'm sure Mr. Stistick understands very well what he's talking about.'

'What do you say, ma'am?' said the judge, turning round to the lady on his left.

'Mr. Stistick is always right on such matters,' said the lady.

'See what it is to have a character. It absolutely enables one to upset the laws of human nature. But still I do say, Mr. Solicitor, that the majority of them were probably boys.'

'Boys!' exclaimed the member of Parliament. 'Boys! I don't think you can have understood a word that we have been saying.'

'I don't think I have,' said the baron.

'There are five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children between—'

'Oh—h—h! male children! Ah—h—h! Now I see the difference; I beg your pardon, Mr. Stistick, but I really was very stupid. And you mean to explain all this to Lord John in the present session?'

'But, Stistick, who is the one man?' said Sir Henry.

'The one man is Lord Boanerges. He, I believe, is the only man living who really understands the social wants of this kingdom.'

'And everything else also,' sneered the baron. The baron always sneered at cleverness that was external to his own profession, especially when exhibited by one who, like the noble lord named, should have confined his efforts to that profession.

'So Boanerges is to take in hand these male children? And very fitting, too; he was made to be a schoolmaster.'

'He is the first man of the age; don't you think so, Sir Henry?'

'He was, certainly, when he was on the wool-sack,' said Sir Henry. 'That is the normal position always assumed by the first man of his age in this country.'

'Though some of them when there do hide their lights under a bushel,' said the judge.

'He is the first law reformer that perhaps ever lived,' said Mr. Stistick, enthusiastically.

'And I hope will be the last in my time,' said his enemy.

'I hope he will live to complete his work,' said the politician.

'Then Methuselah will be a child to him, and Jared and Lamech little babies,' said the judge.

'In such case he has got his work before him, certainly,' said Mr. Solicitor.

And so the battle was kept up between them,

and George Bertram and Lady Harcourt sat by and listened ; or more probably, perhaps, sat by and did not listen.

But when her ladyship and Mrs. Stistick had retreated—Oh, my readers, fancy what that next hour must have been to Caroline Harcourt!—How Gothic, how barbarous are we still in our habits, in that we devote our wives to such wretchedness as that! O, lady, has it ever been your lot to sit out such hour as that with some Mrs. Stistick, who would neither talk, nor read, nor sleep ; in whose company you could neither talk, nor read, nor yet sleep? And if such has been your lot, have you not asked yourself why in this civilized country, in this civilized century, you should be doomed to such a senseless, sleepless purgatory?—But when they were gone, and when the judge, radiant with fun and happiness, hastened to fill his claret beaker, then Bertram by degrees thawed, and began to feel that after all the world was perhaps not yet dead around him.

‘Well, Mr. Stistick,’ said the baron ; ‘if Sir Henry will allow us, we’ll drink Lord Boanerges.’

‘With all my heart,’ said Mr. Stistick. ‘He is a man of whom it may be said—’

‘That no man knew better on which side his bread was buttered.’

‘He is buttering the bread of millions upon millions,’ said Mr. Stistick.

'Or doing better still,' said Bertram; 'enabling them to butter their own. Lord Boanerges is probably the only public man of this day who will be greater in a hundred years than he is now.'

'Let us at any rate hope,' said the baron, 'that he will at that time be less truculent.'

'I can't agree with you, Bertram,' said Sir Henry. 'I consider we are fertile in statesmen. Do you think that Peel will be forgotten in a hundred years?' This was said with the usual candour of a modern turncoat. For Sir Henry had now deserted Peel.

'Almost, I should hope, by that time,' said Bertram. 'He will have a sort of a niche in history, no doubt; as has Mr. Perceval, who did so much to assist us in the war; and Lord Castlereagh, who carried the Union. They also were heaven-sent ministers, whom Acheron has not as yet altogether swallowed up.'

'And Boanerges, you think, will escape Libitina?'

'If the spirit of the age will allow immortality to any man of these days, I think he will. But I doubt whether public opinion, as now existing, will admit of hero-worship.'

'Public opinion is the best safeguard for a great man's great name,' said Mr. Stistick, with intense reliance on the civilization of his own era.

‘Quite true, sir; quite true,’ said the baron, — ‘for the space of twenty-four hours.’

Then followed a calm, and then coffee. After that, the solicitor-general, looking at his watch, marched off impetuous to the House. ‘Judge,’ he said, ‘I know you will excuse me; for you, too, have been a slave in your time: but you will go up to Lady Harcourt; Bertram, you will not be forgiven if you do not go upstairs.’

Bertram did go upstairs, that he might not appear to be unmanly, as he said to himself, in slinking out of the house. He did go upstairs, for one quarter of an hour.

But the baron did not. For him, it may be presumed, his club had charms. Mr. Stistick, however, did do so; he had to hand Mrs. Stistick down from that elysium which she had so exquisitely graced. He did hand her down; and then for five minutes George Bertram found himself once more alone with Caroline Waddington.

‘Good-night, Lady Harcourt,’ he said, again essaying to take her hand. This and his other customary greeting was all that he had yet spoken to her.

‘Good-night, Mr. Bertram.’ At last her voice faltered, at last her eye fell to the ground, at last her hand trembled. Had she stood firm through this trial all might have been well; but though

she could bear herself right manfully before stranger eyes, she could not alone support his gaze ; one touch of tenderness, one sign of weakness was enough—and that touch was there, that sign she gave.

‘We are cousins still, are we not?’ said he.

‘Yes, we are cousins—I suppose so.’

‘And as cousins we need not hate each other?’

‘Hate each other!’ and she shuddered as she spoke ; ‘oh, no, I hope there is no hatred !’

He stood there silent for a moment, looking, not at her, but at the costly ornaments which stood at the foot of the huge pier-glass over the fireplace. Why did he not go now? why did he stand there silent and thoughtful? why—why was he so cruel to her?

‘I hope you are happy, Lady Harcourt,’ at last he said.

There was almost a savage sternness in her face as she made an effort to suppress her feelings. ‘Thank you—yes,’ she said ; and then she added, ‘I never was a believer in much happiness.’

And yet he did not go. ‘We have met now,’ he said, after another pause.

‘Yes, we have met now ;’ and she even attempted to smile as she answered him.

‘And we need not be strangers?’ Then there

was again a pause ; for at first she had no answer ready. ‘Is it needful that we should be strangers?’ he asked.

‘I suppose not ; no ; not if Sir Henry wishes it otherwise.’

And then he put out his hand, and wishing her good-night a second time, he went.

For the next hour, Lady Harcourt sat there looking at the smouldering fire. ‘*Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*’ Not in such language, but with some such thought, did she pass judgment on the wretched folly of her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MADDEN'S BALL.

Two days after the dinner, George Bertram called in Eaton Square and saw Lady Harcourt ; but, as it happened, she was not alone. Their interview on this occasion was not in any great degree embarrassing to either of them. He did not stay long ; and as strangers were present, he was able to talk freely on indifferent subjects. Lady Harcourt probably did not talk much, but she looked as though she did.

And then Adela Gauntlet came up to town for a month ; and George, though he was on three or four occasions in Eaton Square, never saw Caroline alone ; but he became used to seeing her and being with her. The strangeness of their meeting wore itself away : he could speak to her without reserve on the common matters of life, and found that he had intense delight in doing so.

Adela Gauntlet was present at all these inter-

views, and in her heart of hearts condemned them bitterly ; but she could say nothing to Caroline. They had been friends—real friends ; but Caroline was now almost like stone to her. This visit of Adela's had been a long promise—yes, very long ; for the visit, when first promised, was to have been made to Mrs. Bertram. One knows how these promises still live on. Caroline had pressed it even when she felt that Adela's presence could no longer be of comfort to her ; and Adela would not now refuse, lest in doing so she might seem to condemn. But she felt that Caroline Harcourt could never be to her what Caroline Bertram would have been.

Lady Harcourt did whatever in her lay to amuse her guest ; but Adela was one who did not require much amusing. Had there been friendship between her and her friend, the month would have run by all too quickly ; but, as it was, before it was over she wished herself again even at Littlebath.

Bertram dined there twice, and once went with them to some concert. He met them in the Park, and called ; and then there was a great evening gathering in Eaton Square, and he was there. Caroline was careful on all occasions to let her husband know when she met Bertram, and he as often, in some shape, expressed his satisfaction.

‘He’ll marry Adela Gauntlet ; you’ll see if he does not,’ he said to her, after one of their dinners in Eaton Square. ‘She is very pretty, very ; and it will be all very nice ; only I wish that one of them had a little money to go on with.’

Caroline answered nothing to this : she never did make him any answers ; but she felt quite sure in her own heart that he would not marry Adela Gauntlet. And had she confessed the truth to herself, would she have wished him to do so ?

Adela saw and disapproved ; she saw much and could not but disapprove of all. She saw that there was very little sympathy between the husband and wife, and that that little was not on the increase.—Very little ! nay, but was there any ? Caroline did not say much of her lot in life ; but the few words that did fall from her seemed to be full of scorn for all that she had around her, and for him who had given it all. She seemed to say, ‘There—this is that for which I have striven—these ashes on which I now step, and sleep, and feed, which are gritty between my teeth, and foul to my touch ! See, here is my reward ! Do you not honour me for having won it ?’

And then it appeared that Sir Henry Harcourt had already learned how to assume the cross brow

of a captious husband ; that the sharp word was already spoken on light occasions—spoken without cause and listened to with apparent indifference. Even before Adela such words were spoken, and then Caroline would smile bitterly, and turn her face towards her friend, as though she would say, ‘See, see what it is to be the wife of so fine a man, so great a man ! What a grand match have I not made for myself !’ But though her looks spoke thus, no word of complaint fell from her lips—and no word of confidence.

We have said that Sir Henry seemed to encourage these visits which Bertram made to Eaton Square ; and for a time he did so—up to the time of that large evening-party which was given just before Adela’s return to Littlebath. But on that evening, Adela thought she saw a deeper frown than usual on the brows of the solicitor-general, as he turned his eyes to a couch on which his lovely wife was sitting, and behind which George Bertram was standing, but so standing that he could speak and she could hear.

And then Adela bethought herself, that though she could say nothing to Caroline, it might not be equally impossible to say something to Bertram. There had been between them a sort of confidence, and if there was any one to whom Adela could now speak freely, it was to him. They each

knew something of each other's secrets, and each of them, at least, trusted the other.

But this, if it be done at all, must be done on that evening. There was no probability that they would meet again before her departure. This was the only house in which they did meet, and here Adela had no wish to see him more.

'I am come to say good-bye to you,' she said, the first moment she was able to speak to him alone.

'To say good-bye! Is your visit over so soon?'

'I go on Thursday.'

'Well, I shall see you again, for I shall come on purpose to make my adieux.'

'No, Mr. Bertram; do not do that.'

'But I certainly shall.'

'No;' and she put out her little hand, and gently—oh! so gently—touched his arm.

'And why not? Why should I not come to see you? I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose you.'

'You shall not lose me, nor would I willingly lose you. But, Mr. Bertram—'

'Well, Miss Gauntlet?'

'Are you right to be here at all?'

The whole tone, and temper, and character of his face altered as he answered her quickly and sharply—'If not, the fault lies with Sir Henry

Harcourt, who, with some pertinacity, induced me to come here. But why is it wrong that I should be here?—foolish it may be.'

'That is what I mean. I did not say wrong; did I? Do not think that I imagine evil.'

'It may be foolish,' continued Bertram, as though he had not heard her last words. 'But if so, the folly has been his.'

'If he is foolish, is that reason why you should not be wise?'

'And what is it you fear, Adela? What is the injury that will come? Will it be to me, or to her, or to Harcourt?'

'No injury, no real injury—I am sure of that. But may not unhappiness come of it? Does it seem to you that she is happy?'

'Happy! Which of us is happy? Which of us is not utterly wretched? She is as happy as you are? and Sir Henry, I have no doubt, is as happy as I am.'

'In what you say, Mr. Bertram, you do me injustice; I am not unhappy.'

'Are you not? then I congratulate you on getting over the troubles consequent on a true heart.'

'I did not mean in any way to speak of myself; I have cares, regrets, and sorrows, as have most of us; but I have no cause of misery which I cannot assuage.'

'Well, you are fortunate; that is all I can say.'

'But Caroline I can see is not happy; and Mr. Bertram, I fear that your coming here will not make her more so.'

She had said her little word, meaning it so well. But perhaps she had done more harm than good. He did not come again to Eaton Square till after she was gone; but very shortly after that he did so.

Adela had seen that short, whispered conversation between Lady Harcourt and Bertram—that moment, as it were, of confidence; and so, also, had Sir Henry; and yet it had been but for a moment.

'Lady Harcourt,' Bertram had said, 'how well you do this sort of thing!'

'Do I?' she answered. 'Well, one ought to do something well.'

'Do you mean to say that your excellence is restricted to this?'

'Pretty nearly; such excellence as there is.'

'I should have thought—' and then he paused.

'You are not coming to reproach me, I hope,' she said.

'Reproach you, Lady Harcourt! No; my reproaches, silent or expressed, never fall on your head.'

'Then you must be much altered ;' and as she said these last words, in what was hardly more than a whisper, she saw some lady in a distant part of the room to whom some attention might be considered to be due, and rising from her seat she walked away across the room. It was very shortly after that Adela had spoken to him.

For many a long and bitter day, Bertram had persuaded himself that she had not really loved him. He had doubted it when she had first told him so calmly that it was necessary that their marriage should be postponed for years ; he had doubted it much when he found her, if not happy, at least contented under that postponement ; doubt had become almost certainty when he learnt that she discussed his merits with such a one as Henry Harcourt ; but on that day, at Richmond, when he discovered that the very secrets of his heart were made subject of confidential conversation with this man, he had doubted it no longer. Then he had gone to her, and his reception proved to him that his doubts had been too well founded—his certainty only too sure. And so he had parted with her—as we all know.

But now he began to doubt his doubts—to be less certain of his certainty. That she did not much love Sir Henry, that was very apparent ; that she could not listen to his slightest word

without emotion—that, too, he could perceive ; that Adela conceived that she still loved him, and that his presence there was therefore dangerous—that also had been told to him. Was it then possible that he, loving this woman as he did —having never ceased in his love for one moment, having still loved her with his whole heart, his whole strength—that he had flung her from him while her heart was still his own ? Could it be that she, during their courtship, should have seemed so cold and yet had loved him ?

'A thousand times he had reproached her in his heart for being worldly ; but now the world seemed to have no charms for her. A thousand times he had declared that she cared only for the outward show of things, but these outward shows were now wholly indifferent to her. That they in no degree contributed to her happiness, or even to her contentment, that was made manifest enough to him. '

And then these thoughts drove him wild, and he began to ask himself whether there could be yet any comfort in the fact that she had loved him, and perhaps loved him still. The motives by which men are actuated in their conduct are not only various, but mixed. As Bertram thought in this way concerning Lady Harcourt—the Caroline Waddington that had once belonged to himself—he proposed to himself no scheme of

infamy, no indulgence of a disastrous love, no ruin for her whom the world now called so fortunate ; but he did think that, if she still loved him, it would be pleasant to sit and talk with her; pleasant to feel some warmth in her hand ; pleasant that there should be some confidence in her voice. And so he resolved—but, no, there was no resolve ; but he allowed it to come to pass that his intimacy in Eaton Square should not be dropped.

And then he bethought himself of the part which his friend Harcourt had played in this matter, and speculated as to how that pleasant fellow had cheated him out of his wife. What Adela had said might be very true, but why should he regard Sir Henry's happiness ? why regard any man's happiness, or any woman's ? Who had regarded him ? So he hired a horse, and rode in the Park when he knew Lady Harcourt would be there, dined with Baron Brawl because Lady Harcourt was to dine there, and went to a ball at Mrs. Madden's for the same reason. All which the solicitor-general now saw, and did not press his friend to take a part at any more of his little dinners.

What may have passed on the subject between Sir Henry and his wife cannot be said. A man does not willingly accuse his wife of even the first germ of infidelity ; does not willingly sug-

gest to her that any one is of more moment to her than himself. It is probable that his brow became blacker than it had been, that his words were less courteous, and his manner less kind; but of Bertram himself, it may be presumed that he said nothing. It might, however, have been easy for Caroline to perceive that he no longer wished to have his old friend at his house.

At Mrs. Madden's ball, Bertram asked her to dance with him, and she did stand up for a quadrille. Mr. Madden was a rich young man, in Parliament, and an intimate friend both of Sir Henry's and of Bertram's. Caroline had danced with him—being her first performance of that nature since her marriage; and having done so, she could not, as she said to herself, refuse Mr Bertram. So they stood up; and the busy solicitor-general, who showed himself for five minutes in the room, saw them moving, hand-in-hand together, in the figure of the dance. And as he so moved, Bertram himself could hardly believe in the reality of his position. What if any one had prophesied to him three months since that he would be dancing with Caroline Harcourt!

'Adela did not stay with you long,' said he, as they were standing still.

'No, not very long. I do not think she ~~is~~ fond of London; and then they were again silent till their turn for dancing was over.'

'No; I don't think she is,' said Bertram, 'nor am I. I should not care if I were to leave it for ever. Do you like London, Lady Harcourt?'

'Oh, yes; as well as any other place. I don't think it much signifies—London, or Littlebath, or New Zealand.'

They were then both silent for a moment, till Bertram again spoke, with an effort that was evident in his voice.

'You used not to be so indifferent in such matters.'

'Used!'

'Has all the world so changed that nothing is any longer of any interest?'

'The world has changed, certainly—with me.'

'And with me also, Lady Harcourt. The world has changed with both of us. But Fortune, while she has been crushing me, has been very kind to you.'

'Has she? Well, perhaps she has—as kind, at any rate, as I deserve. But you may be sure of this—I do not complain of her.' And then they were again silent.

'I wonder whether you ever think of old days?' he said, after a pause.

'At any rate, I never talk of them, Mr. Bertram.'

'No; I suppose not. One should not talk of them. But out of a full heart the mouth will

speak. Constant thoughts will break forth in words. There is nothing else left to me of which I can think.'

Any one looking at her face as she answered him would have little dreamed how much was passing through her mind, how much was weighing on her heart. She commanded not only her features, but even her colour, and the motion of her eyes. No anger flashed from them; there was no blush of indignation as she answered him in that crowded room. And yet her words were indignant enough, and there was anger, too, in that low tone which reached his ear so plainly, but which reached no further.

'And whose doing has this been? Why is it that I may not think of past times? Why is it that all thought, all memories are denied to me? Who was it that broke the cup at the very fountain?'

'Was it I?'

'Did you ever think of your prayers? "Forgive us our trespasses." But you, in your pride—you could forgive nothing. And now you dare to twit me with my fortune?'

'Lady Harcourt?'

'I will sit down, if you please, now. I do not know why I speak thus.' And then, without further words, she caused herself to be led away, and sitting down between two old dowagers, de-

barred him absolutely from the power of another word.

Immediately after this he left the house ; but she remained for another hour—remained and danced with young Lord Echo, who was a Whig lordling ; and with Mr. Twisleton, whose father was a Treasury secretary. They both talked to her about Harcourt, and the great speech he was making at that moment ; and she smiled and looked so beautiful, that when they got together at one end of the supper-table, they declared that Harcourt was out-and-out the luckiest dog of his day ; and questioned his right to monopolize such a treasure.

And had he been cruel ? had he been unfor-giving ? had he denied to her that pardon which it behoved him so often to ask for himself ? This was the question which Bertram was now forced to put to himself. And that other question, which he could now answer but in one way. Had he then been the cause of his own shipwreck ? Had he driven his own bark on the rocks while the open channel was there clear before him ? Had she not now assured him of her love, though no word of tenderness had passed her lips ? And whose doing had it been ? Yes, certainly ; it had been his own doing.

The conviction which thus came upon him did not add much to his comfort. There was but

little consolation to him now in the assurance that she had loved, and did love him. He had hitherto felt himself to be an injured man ; but now he had to feel that he himself had committed the injury. ‘ Whose doing has it been ? You —you in your pride, could forgive nothing !’ These words rang in his ears ; his memory repeated to him hourly the tone in which they had been spoken. She had accused him of destroying all her hopes for this world—and he had answered not a word to the accusation.

On the morning after that ball at Mrs. Madden’s, Sir Henry came into his wife’s room while she was still dressing. ‘ By-the-by,’ said he, ‘ I saw you at Mrs. Madden’s last night.’

‘ Yes ; I perceived that you were there for a moment,’ Caroline answered.

‘ You were dancing. I don’t know that I ever saw you dancing before.’

‘ I have not done so since I was married. In former days I used to be fond of it.’

‘ Ah, yes ; when you were at Littlebath. It did not much matter then what you did in that way ; but—’

‘ Does it matter more now, Sir Henry ?’

‘ Well, if it would entail no great regret, I would rather that you did not dance. It is all very nice for girls.’

‘ You do not mean to say that married women—’

'I do not mean to say anything of the kind. One man has one idea, and another another. Some women also are not placed in so conspicuous a position as you are.'

'Why did you not tell me your wishes before?'

'It did not occur to me. I did not think it probable that you would dance. May I understand that you will give it up?'

'As you direct me to do so, of course I shall.'

'Direct! I do not direct, I only request.'

'It is the same thing, exactly. I will not dance again. I should have felt the prohibition less had I been aware of your wishes before I had offended.'

'Well, if you choose to take it in that light, I cannot help it. Good-morning. I shall not dine at home to-day.'

And so the solicitor-general went his way, and his wife remained sitting motionless at her dressing-table. They had both of them already become aware that the bargain they had made was not a wise one.

CHAPTER V.

CAN I ESCAPE?

HAD not George Bertram been of all men the most infirm of purpose, he would have quitted London immediately after that ball—at any rate, for many months. But he was lamentably infirm of purpose. He said to himself over and over again, that it behoved him to go. What had either of them done for him that he should regard them? That had hitherto been the question within his own breast; but now it was changed. Had he not greatly injured her? Had she not herself told him that his want of mercy had caused all her misery? Ought he not, at any rate, to spare her now? But yet he remained. He must ask her pardon before he went; he would do that, and then he would go.

His object was to see her without going to Eaton Square. His instinct told him that Sir Henry no longer wished to see him there, and he was unwilling to enter the house of any one who did not wish his presence. For two weeks he

failed in his object. He certainly did see Lady Harcourt, but not in such a way as to allow of conversation ; but at last fortune was propitious,—or the reverse, and he found himself alone with her.

She was seated quite alone, turning over the engravings which lay in a portfolio before her, when he came up to her.

‘ Do not be angry,’ he said, ‘ if I ask you to listen to me for a few moments.’

She still continued to move the engravings before her, but with a slower motion than before ; and though her eye still rested on the plates, he might have seen, had he dared to look at her, that her mind was far away from them. He might have seen also that there was no flash of anger now in her countenance : her spirit was softer than on that evening when she had reproached him ; for she had remembered that he also had been deeply injured. But she answered nothing to the request which he thus made.

‘ You told me that I was unforgiving,’ he continued, ‘ I now come to beg that you will not be unforgiving also ; that is, if I have done anything that has caused you—caused you to be less happy than you might have been.’

‘ Less happy !’ she said ; but not with that scorn with which she had before repeated his words.

‘ You believe, I hope, that I would wish you to be happy ; that I would do anything in my power to make you so ? ’

‘ There can be nothing now in your power, Mr. Bertram.’ And as she spoke she involuntarily put an emphasis on the now, which made her words convey much more than she had intended.

‘ No,’ he said. ‘ No. What can such a one as I do ? What could I ever have done ? But say that you forgive me, Lady Harcourt.’

‘ Let us both forgive,’ she whispered, and as she did so, she put out her hand to him. ‘ Let us both forgive. It is all that we can do for each other.’

‘ Oh, Caroline, Caroline !’ he said, speaking hardly above his breath, and with his eyes averted, but still holding her hand ; or attempting to hold it, for as he spoke she withdrew it.

‘ I was unjust to you the other night. It is so hard to be just when one is so wretched. We have been like two children who have quarrelled over their plaything, and broken it in pieces while it was yet new. We cannot put the wheels again together, or make the broken reed produce sweet sounds.’

‘ No,’ he said. ‘ No, no, no. No sounds are any longer sweet. There is no music now.’

‘ But as we have both sinned, Mr. Bertram, so should we both forgive.’

‘But I—I have nothing to forgive.’

‘Alas, yes! and mine was the first fault. I knew that you really loved me, and—’

‘Loved you! Oh, Caroline!’

‘Hush, Mr. Bertram; not so; do not speak so. I know that you would not wrong me; I know you would not lead me into trouble—not into further trouble; into worse misery.’

‘And I, that might have led you—no; that might have been led to such happiness! Lady Harcourt, when I think of what I have thrown away—’

‘Think of it not at all, Mr. Bertram.’

‘And you; can you command your thoughts?’

‘Sometimes; and by practice I hope always; at any rate, I make an effort. And now, good-bye. It will be sweet to me to hear that you have forgiven me. You were very angry, you know, when you parted from me last at Littlebath.’

‘If there be anything for me to forgive, I do forgive it with all my heart; with all my heart.’

‘And now, God bless you, Mr. Bertram. The thing that would most tend to make me contented would be to see you married to some one you could love; a weight would then be off my soul which now weighs on it very heavily.’ And so saying, she rose from her seat and left him standing over the engravings. He had thrown his

pearl away ; a pearl richer than all his tribe. There was nothing for him now but to bear the loss.

There were other sources of unpleasantness between Sir Henry and his wife besides her inclination for dancing. Sir Henry had now paid one half-year's interest on the sum of money which had been lent to him by the old gentleman at Hadley, and had been rather disgusted at finding that it was taken as a matter of course. He was not at the present moment by any means overburdened with money. His constant devotion to politics interfered considerably with his practice. He was also perhaps better known as a party lawyer than as a practical or practising one ; and thus, though his present career was very brilliant, it was not quite so profitable as he had hoped. Most lawyers when they begin to devote themselves to politics have secured, if not fortune, at least the means of making it. And, even at his age, Sir Henry might have been said to have done this had his aspirations been in any way moderate. But they were not moderate. He wished to shine with extreme brilliancy ; to live up to the character for wealth which the world gave him ; and to give it out as a fact to be understood by all men that he was to be the heir of the Hadley Croesus.

There was, perhaps, a certain wisdom in this, a

wisdom of a dashing chancy nature. Fortune favours the brave ; and the world certainly gives the most credit to those who are able to give an unlimited credit to themselves. But there was certainly risk in the life he led. The giving of elegant little dinners two or three times a week in London is an expensive amusement—and so he began to be very anxious about the old gentleman.

But what was he to do that he might get near those money-bags ? There was the game. What best sportsman's dodge might he use so as to get it into his bag ? Perhaps to do nothing, to use no sportsman's dodge would have been the best. But then it is so hard to do nothing when so much might be gained by doing something very well.

Sir Henry, duly instructed as to the weaknesses customary to old men, thought his wife would be his best weapon—his surest dodge. If she could be got to be attentive and affectionate to her grandfather, to visit him, and flatter him, and hover about him, much might be done. So thought Sir Henry. But do what he might, Lady Harcourt would not assist him. It was not part of her bargain that she should toady an old man who had never shown any special regard for her.

‘I think you ought to go down to Hadley,’ Sir Henry said to her one morning.

‘What, to stay there?’ said Caroline.

‘Yes; for a fortnight or so. Parliament will be up now in three weeks, and I shall go to Scotland for a few days. Could not you make it out with the old gentleman till you go to the Grimsdale’s?’

‘I would much rather remain at home, Sir Henry.’

‘Ah, yes; that is just like you. And I would much rather that you went.’

‘If you wish to shut the house up, I shall not object to go to Littlebath.’

‘Very probably not. But I should object to you going there—exceedingly object to it. Of all places, it is the most vulgar—the most—’

‘You forget that I have dear friends living there.’

‘Dear friends! Yes; Miss Todd, I suppose. I think we may as well leave Miss Todd alone. At the present moment, I am particularly anxious that you should be attentive to your grandfather.’

‘But I have never been in the habit of staying at Hadley.’

‘Then the sooner you get into the habit the better.’

‘I cannot think why you should wish me to trouble an old man who would not have the slightest pleasure in seeing me.’

‘That is all nonsense. If you behaved well to him, he would have pleasure. Do you ever write to him?’

‘Never.’

‘Write to him to-day then, and ask whether he would be glad to have you.’

Caroline did not answer her husband immediately, but went on buttering her toast, and sipping her tea. She had never yet disobeyed any positive order that he had given, and she was now thinking whether she could obey this order; or, if not, how she would explain to him that she could not do so.

‘Well!’ said he; ‘why do you not answer me? Will you write to him to-day?’

‘I had much rather not.’

‘Does that mean that you won’t?’

‘I fear, Sir Henry, that it must mean it. I have not been on terms with my grandfather which would admit of my doing so.’

‘Nonsense!’ said her lord and master.

‘You are not very civil to me this morning.’

‘How can a man be civil when he hears such trash as that? You know how I am situated—how great the stake is; and you will do nothing to help me win it.’ To this she made no answer. Of what use would it be for her to answer? She also had thrown away her pearl, and taken in ex-

change this piece of brass. There was nothing for her, too, but to bear her misery.

'Upon my word, you take it all very coolly,' he continued; 'you seem to think that houses, and furniture, and carriages, and horses are to grow up all round you without any effort on your own part. Does it ever strike you that these things cost money?'

'I will give them all up to-morrow if you wish it.'

'That you know is nonsense.'

'It was your doing to surround me with these things, and your reproach is not just. Nay, it is not manly.'

'A woman's idea of manliness is very extended. You expect to get everything, and to do nothing. You talk of justice! Do you not know that when I married you, I looked to your uncle's fortune?'

'Certainly not: had I known it, I should have told you how vain I believed any such hope to be.'

'Then, why on earth—?' But he refrained from finishing his question. Even he could not bring himself to tell her that he had married her with no other view. He merely slammed the door behind him as he left the room.

Yes; she had certainly thrown her pearl away. What a life was this to which she had doomed

herself! what treatment was this for that Caroline Waddington, who had determined to win the world and wear it! She had given herself to a brute, who had taken her only because she might perhaps be the heiress of a rich old man.

And then she thought of that lost pearl. How could she do other than think of it? She thought of what her life would have been had she bravely committed herself to his hands, fearing nothing, trusting everything. She remembered his energy during those happy days in which he had looked forward to an early marriage. She remembered his tenderness of manner, the natural gallantry of his heart, the loving look of his bold eye; and then she thought of her husband.

Yes, she thought of him long and wildly. And as she did so, the indifference with which she had regarded him grew into hatred. She shuddered as her imagination made that frightful contrast between the picture which her eyes would have so loved to look on if it were only lawful, and that other picture to look on which was her legal doom. Her brow grew wildly black as she thought of his caresses, his love, which were more hateful to her even than his coarse ill-humour. She thought of all this; and, as she did so, she asked herself that question which comes first to the mind of all creatures when in misery: Is there no means of release;

no way of escape? was her bark utterly ruined, and for ever?

That marriage without love is a perilous step for any woman who has a heart within her bosom. For those who have none—or only so much as may be necessary for the ordinary blood-circulating department—such an arrangement may be convenient enough. Caroline Waddington had once flattered herself that that heart of hers was merely a blood-circulating instrument. But she had discovered her mistake, and learned the truth before it was too late. She had known what it was to love—and yet she had married Henry Harcourt! Seldom, indeed, will punishment be so lame of foot as to fail in catching such a criminal as she had been.

Punishment—bitter, cruel, remorseless punishment—had caught her now, and held her tight within its grasp. He, too, had said that he was wretched. But what could his wretchedness be to hers? He was not married to a creature that he hated: he was not bound in a foul Mezentian embrace to a being against whom all his human gorge rose in violent disgust. Oh! if she could only be alone, as he was alone! If it could be granted to her to think of her love, to think of him in solitude and silence—in a solitude which no beast with a front of brass and feet of clay had a right to break, both by night and day!

Ah! if her wretchedness might only be as his wretchedness! How blessed would she not think herself!

And then she again asked herself whether there might not be some escape. That women had separated themselves from their husbands, she well knew. That pleas of ill-usage, of neglect, of harshness of temper, had been put forward and accepted by the world, to the partial enfranchisement of the unhappy wife, she had often heard. But she had also heard that in such cases cruelty must be proved. A hasty word, a cross look, a black brow would not suffice. Nor could she plead that she hated the man, that she had never loved him, that she had married him in wounded pique, because her lover—he whom she did love—had thrown her off. There was no ground, none as yet, on which she could claim her freedom. She had sold herself as a slave, and she must abide her slavery. She had given herself to this beast with the face of brass and the feet of clay, and she must endure the cold misery of his den. Separation—solitude—silence! He—that he whom her heart worshipped—he might enjoy such things; but for her—there was no such relief within her reach.

She had gone up into her room when Sir Henry left her, in order that no one might see her wretchedness, and there she remained for hours.

‘No!’ at last she said aloud, lifting her head from the pillow on which her face had been all but hid, and standing erect in the room; ‘no! I will not bear it. I will not endure it. He cannot make me.’ And with quick steps she walked across and along the room, stretching forth her arms as though seeking aid from some one; ay, and as though she were prepared to fight the battle herself if no one would come to aid her.

At this moment there was a knock at her chamber-door, and her maid came in.

‘Mr. Bertram is in the drawing-room, my lady.’

‘Mr. Bertram! Which Mr. Bertram?’

‘Mr. Bertram, my lady; the gentleman that comes here. Sir Henry’s friend.’

‘Oh, very well. Why did John say that I was at home?’

‘Oh, my lady, I can’t say that. Only he told me to tell your ladyship that Mr. Bertram was in the drawing-room.’

Lady Harcourt paused for a moment. Then she said, ‘I will be down directly;’ and the Abigail retired. During that moment she had decided that, as he was there, she would meet him yet once again.

It has been said that Bertram was unwilling to go to Sir Henry’s house. As long as he had thought of remaining in town he was so. But

now he had resolved to fly, and had resolved also that before he did so he would call in the ordinary way and say one last farewell. John, the servant, admitted him at once; though he had on that same morning sent bootless away a score of other suppliants for the honour of being admitted to Lady Harcourt's presence.

Bertram was standing with his back to the door, looking into a small conservatory that opened from the drawing-room, when the mistress of the house entered. She walked straight up to him, after having carefully closed the door, and just touching his hand, she said, 'Mr. Bertram, why are you here? You should be thousands and thousands of miles away if that were possible. Why are you here?'

'Lady Harcourt, I will divide myself from you by any distance you may demand. But may I not come to you to tell you that I am going?'

'To tell me that you are going!'

'Yes. I shall not trouble you much longer. I have become sure of this: that to remain near you and not to love you, to remain near you and not to say that I love you is impossible. And therefore I am going.' And he held out his hand, which she had as yet hardly taken—had barely touched.

He was going; but she was to remain. He would escape; but her prison bars could not be

broken. Ah, that she could have gone with him ! How little now would wealth have weighed with her ; or high worldly hopes, or dreams of ambition ! To have gone with him anywhere—honestly to have gone with him—trusting to honest love and a true heart. Ah ! how much joy is there in this mortal, moribund world if one will but open one's arms to take it !

Ah ! young ladies, sweet young ladies, dear embryo mothers of our England as it will be, think not overmuch of your lovers' incomes. He that is true and honest will not have to beg his bread—neither his nor yours. The true and honest do not beg their bread, though it may be that for awhile they eat it without much butter. But what then ? If a wholesome loaf on your tables, and a strong arm round your waists, and a warm heart to lean on cannot make you happy, you are not the girls for whom I take you.

Caroline's bread was buttered, certainly ; but the butter had been mixed with gall, and she could not bring herself to swallow it. And now he had come to tell her that he was going ; he whose loaf, and arm, and heart she might have shared. What would the world say of her if she were to share his flight ?

' Good-bye,' she said, as she took his proffered hand.

‘And is that all?’

‘What would you have, Mr. Bertram?’

‘What would I have? Ah, me! I would have that which is utterly—utterly—utterly beyond my reach.’

‘Yes, utterly—utterly,’ she repeated. And as she said so, she thought again, what would the world say of her if she were to share his flight?

‘I suppose that now, for the last time, I may speak truly—as a man should speak. Lady Harcourt, I have never ceased to love you, never for one moment; never since that day when we walked together among those strange tombs. My love for you has been the dream of my life.’

‘But, why—why—why?’ She could not speak further, for her voice was choked with tears.

‘I know what you would say. Why was I so stern to you?’

‘Why did you go away? Why did you not come to us?’

‘Because you distrusted me; not as your lover, but as a man. But I did not come here to blame you, Caroline.’

‘Nor to be blamed.’

‘No, nor to be blamed. What good can come of reproaches? We now know each other’s faults, if we never did before. And we know also each other’s truth—’ He paused a moment,

and then added, ‘For, Caroline, your heart has been true.’

She sat herself down upon a chair, and wept, with her face hidden within her hands. Yes, her heart had been true enough; if only her words, her deeds, her mind could have been true also.

He came up to her, and lightly put his hand upon her shoulder. His touch was very light, but yet she felt that there was love in it—illicit, dishonest love. There was treason in it to her lord’s rights. Her lord! Yes, he was her lord, and it was treason. But it was very sweet that touch; it was as though a thrill of love passed across her and embraced her whole body. Treason to such a creature as that! a brute with a face of brass and feet of clay, who had got hold of her with a false idea that by her aid he could turn his base brass into gold as base! Could there be treason to such a one as he? Ah! what would the world say of her were she to share that flight?

‘Caroline,’ he murmured in her ear. ‘Caroline; dearest Caroline!’ Thus he murmured soft words into her ear, while his hand still rested gently on her shoulder—oh, so gently! And still she answered nothing, but the gurgling of her sobs was audible to him enough. ‘Caroline,’ he repeated; ‘dearest, dearest Caroline.’ And then he was on his knees beside her; and the

hand which had touched her shoulder was now pressed upon her arm.

‘Caroline, speak to me—say one word. I will go if you bid me. Yes, even alone. I will go alone if you have the heart to say so. Speak, Caroline.’

‘What would you have me say?’ and she looked at him through her tears, so haggard, so wild, so changed, that he was almost frightened at her countenance. ‘What would you have me say? what would you have me do?’

‘I will be your slave if you will let me,’ said he.

‘No, George—you mean that I might be your slave—for awhile, till you thought me too base even for that.’

‘Ah! you little know me.’

‘I should but little know you if I thought you could esteem me in that guise. There; God’s mercy has not deserted me. It is over now. Go, George—go—go; thou, only love of my heart; my darling; mine that might have been; mine that never can be now—never—never—never. Go, George. It is over now. I have been base, and vile, and cowardly—unworthy of your dear memory. But it shall not be so again. You shall not blush that you have loved me.’

‘But, ah! that I have lost your love.’

‘You shall not blush that you have loved me, nor will I blush that I, too, have loved you. Go,

George ; and remember this, the farther, the longer, the more entirely we are apart, the better, the safer it will be. There ; there. Go now. I can bear it now ; dearest, dearest George.'

He took her outstretched hands in his, and stood for awhile gazing into her face. Then, with the strong motion of his arms, he drew her close to his breast, pressed her to his heart, and imprinted one warm kiss upon her brow. Then he left her, and got to the drawing-room door with his fleetest step.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said John, who met him exactly on the landing ; 'but I think my lady rang.'

'Lady Bertram did not ring. She is not well, and you had better not disturb her,' said Bertram, trying to look as though he were no whit disconcerted.

'Oh, very well, sir ; then I'll go down again ;' and so saying John followed George Bertram into the hall, and opened the door for him very politely.

CHAPTER VI.

A MATRIMONIAL DIALOGUE.

SIR HENRY had said also on this day that he would not dine at home; but he came home before dinner; and after being for a few minutes in his own study, he sent for his wife. Abigail, coming up to her, brought her Sir Henry's love, and would she be good enough to step downstairs for five minutes? This was very civil; so she did step down, and found Sir Henry alone in his study.

'George Bertram has been here to-day?' were the first words which the husband spoke when he saw that the door had been fairly closed behind his wife.

What communication there may have been between Sir Henry and his servant John is, oh my reader, a matter too low for you and me. That there had been some communication we must both fear. Not that Sir Henry wished to find his wife guilty; not that he at all sus-

pected that he should find her guilty. But he did wish to have her entirely in his power; and he wished also that Bertram should be altogether banished from his house.

‘George Bertram has been here to-day?’ He did not look cruel, or violent, or threatening as he spoke; but yet there was that in his eye which was intended to make Caroline tremble. Caroline, however, did not tremble; but looking up into his face with calm dignity replied, that Mr. Bertram had called that morning.

‘And would you object to telling me what passed between you?’

Caroline still looked him full in the face. He was sitting, but she had not sat down. She was standing before him, faultless in demeanour, in posture, and in dress. If it had been his aim to confound her, he certainly had so far missed his object.

‘Would I object to telling you what passed between us? The question is a very singular one;’ and then she paused a moment. ‘Yes, Sir Henry, I should object.’

‘I thought as much,’ said he.

She still stood before him, perfectly silent; and he sat there, silent also. He hardly knew how to go on with the interview. He wanted her to defend herself, but this was the very thing which she did not intend to do. ‘May I go now?’ she asked, after awhile.

'No; not quite yet. Sit down, Caroline; sit down. I wish to speak to you. George Bertram has been here, and there has been that between you of which you are ashamed to speak!'

'I never said so, Sir Henry—nor will I allow you to say so. There has been that between us to-day which I would rather bury in silence. But if you command me, I will tell you all.'

'Command! you are always talking of commands.'

'I have to do so very often. In such marriages as ours they must be spoken of—must be thought of. If you command me, I will tell you. If you do not, I will be silent.'

Sir Henry hardly knew what answer to make to this. His object was to frighten his wife. That there had been words between her and George Bertram of which she, as his wife, would be afraid to tell, he had been thoroughly convinced. Yet she now offered to repeat to him everything if he would only desire her to do so; and in making this offer, she seemed to be anything but afraid.

'Sit down, Caroline.' She then sat down just opposite to him. 'I should have thought that you would have felt that, circumstanced as he, and you, and I are, the intercourse between you and him should have been of the most restrained kind—should have had in it nothing of the old familiarity.'

'Who brought us again together?'

'I did so; trusting to your judgment and good taste.'

'I did not wish to see him. I did not ask him here. I would have remained at home month after month rather than have met him had I been allowed my own way.'

'Nonsense! Why should you have been so afraid to meet him?'

'Because I love him.'

As she said this she still looked into his face fearlessly—we may almost say boldly; so much so that Sir Henry's eyes almost quailed before hers. On this she had at any rate resolved, that she would never quail before him.

But by degrees there came across his brow a cloud that might have made her quail had she not been bold. He had come there determined not to quarrel with her. An absolute quarrel with her would not suit him—would not further his plans, as they were connected with Mr. Bertram at Hadley. But it might be that he could not fail to quarrel with her. He was not a man without blood in his veins—without feelings at his heart. He could have loved her in his way, could she have been content to love him. Nay, he had loved her; and while she was the acknowledged possession of another, he had thought that to obtain her he would have been willing to give

up many worldly goods. Now he had obtained her; and there she sat, avowing to him that she still loved his unsuccessful rival. It was no wonder that his brow grew black, despite his own policy.

'And he has been here to-day in order that you might tell him so?'

'He has been here to-day, and I did tell him so,' said Caroline, looking still full up into her husband's eyes. 'What brought him here I cannot say.'

'And you tell me this to my face?'

'Well; would you have me tell you a lie? Did I not tell you the same when you first asked me to marry you? Did I not repeat it to you again but a week before we were married? Do you think that a few months could make the difference? Do you think that such months as these have been could have effaced his memory?'

'And you mean, then, to entertain him as your lover?'

'I mean to entertain him not at all. I mean that he shall never again enter any house in which I may be doomed to live. You brought him here; and I—though I knew that the trial would be hard—I thought that I could bear it. I find that I cannot. My memory is too clear; my thoughts of other days too vivid; my remorse—'

‘Go on, madam ; pray go on.’

‘No, I shall not go on. I have said enough.’

‘Ah ! you said more than that to him when he was here.’

‘Not half so much.’

‘Was he not kneeling at your feet ?’

‘Yes, sir, he did kneel at my feet ;’ and as she answered the question she rose up, as though it were impossible for her any longer to sit in the presence of a man who so evidently had set a spy upon her actions.

‘Well, and what then ? Since you are so little ashamed of the truth, tell it all.’

‘I am not at all ashamed of the truth. He came to tell me that he was going—and I bade him go.’

‘And you allowed him to embrace you—to hold you in his arms—to kiss you ?’

‘Ah me ! yes—for the last time. He did kiss me. I feel his lips now upon my brow. And then I told him that I loved him ; loved none but him ; could love none other. Then I bade him begone ; and he went. Now, sir, I think you know it all. You seem to have had two accounts of the interview ; I hope they do not disagree ?’

‘Such audacious effrontery I never witnessed in my life—never heard of before !’

‘What, sir, did you think that I should lie to you ?’

'I thought there was some sense of shame left in you.'

'Too high a sense of shame for that. I wish you could know it all. I wish I could tell you the tone of his voice, and the look of his eye. I wish I could tell you how my heart drooped, and all but fainted, as I felt that he must leave me for ever. I am a married woman, and it was needful that he should go.' After this there was a slight pause, and then she added: 'Now, Sir Henry, I think you know it all. Now may I go?'

He rose from his chair and began walking the length of the room, backwards and forwards, with quick step. As we have before said, he had a heart in his bosom; he had blood in his veins; he had those feelings of a man which make the scorn of a beautiful woman so intolerable. And then she was his wife, his property, his dependent, his own. For a moment he forgot the Hadley money-bags, sorely as he wanted them, and the true man spoke out with full, unabated anger.

'Brazen-faced harlot!' he exclaimed, as he passed her in his walk; 'unmitigated harlot!'

'Yes, sir,' she answered, in a low tone, coming up to him as she spoke, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking still full into his face—looking into it with such a gaze that even he cowered

before her. ‘Yes, sir, I was the thing you say. When I came to you, and sold my woman’s purity for a name, a house, a place before the world—when I gave you my hand, but could not give my heart, I was—what you have said.’

‘And were doubly so when he stood here slobbering on your neck.’

‘No, Sir Henry, no. False to him I have been; false to my own sex; false, very false to my own inner self; but never false to you.’

‘Madam, you have forgotten my honour.’

‘I have at any rate been able to remember my own.’

They were now standing face to face; and as she said these last words, it struck Sir Henry that it might be well to take them as a sign of grace, and to commence from them that half-forgiveness which would be necessary to his projects.

‘You have forgotten yourself, Caroline—’

‘Stop a moment, Sir Henry, and let me finish, since you will not allow me to remain silent. I have never been false to you, I say; and, by God’s help, I never will be—’

‘Well, well.’

‘Stop, sir, and let me speak. I have told you often that I did not love you. I tell you so now again. I have never loved you—never shall love you. You have called me now by

a base name ; and in that I have lived with you and have not loved you, I dare not say that you have called me falsely. But I will sin no more.'

'What is it you mean ?'

'I will not deserve the name again—even from you.'

'Nonsense ; I do not understand you. You do not know what you are saying.'

'Yes, Sir Henry, I do know well what I am saying. It may be that I have done you some injury ; if so, I regret it. God knows that you have done me much. We can neither of us now add to each other's comfort, and it will be well that we should part.'

'Do you mean me to understand that you intend to leave me ?'

'That is what I intend you to understand.'

'Nonsense ; you will do no such thing.'

'What ! would you have us remain together, hating each other, vilifying each other, calling each other base names as you just now called me ? And do you think that we could still be man and wife ? No, Sir Henry. I have made one great mistake—committed one wretched, fatal error. I have so placed myself that I must hear myself so called and bear it quietly ; but I will not continue to be so used. Do you think he would have called me so ?'

‘Damn him!’

‘That will not hurt him. Your words are impotent against him, though they may make me shudder.’

‘Do not speak of him, then.’

‘No, I will not. I will only think of him.’

‘By heavens! Caroline, your only wish is to make me angry.’

‘I may go now, I suppose?’

‘Go—yes; you may go; I will speak to you to-morrow, when you will be more cool.’

‘To-morrow, Sir Henry, I will not speak to you; nor the day afterwards, nor the day after that. What you may wish to say now I will hear; but remember this—after what has passed to-day, no consideration on earth shall induce me to live with you again. In any other respect I will obey your orders—if I find it possible.’

She stayed yet a little while longer, leaning against the table, waiting to hear whether or no he would answer her; but as he sat silent, looking before him, but not at her, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, she without further words withdrew, and quietly closed the door after her. As she did so, the faithful John was seen moving away to the top of the kitchen stairs. She would hardly have cared had the faithful John been present during the whole interview.

Sir Henry sat silent for a quarter of an hour, meditating how he would now play his game. As regarded merely personal considerations, he was beginning to hate Caroline almost as much as she hated him. A man does not like to be told by a beautiful woman that every hair of his head is odious to her, while the very footsteps of another are music in her ears. Perhaps it does not mend the matter when the hated man is the husband.

But still Sir Henry wished to keep his wife. It has been quite clear that Caroline had thrown up her game. She had flattered herself that she could play it; but the very moment the cards went against her, she discovered her own weakness and threw them away. Sir Henry was of a stronger mind, and not so easily disgusted: he would try yet another deal. Indeed, his stakes were too high to allow of his abandoning them.

So arousing himself with some exertion, he dressed himself, went out to dine, hurried down to the House, and before the evening was over was again the happy, fortunate solicitor-general, fortune's pet, the Crichton of the hour, the rising man of his day.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN TO HADLEY.

WE must now return for awhile to Hadley. Since the day on which Miss Baker had written that letter to Sir Lionel, she had expressed no wish to leave her uncle's house. Littlebath had no charms for her now. The colonel was still there, and so was the colonel's first love—Miss Todd: let them forgive and forget, and marry each other at last if they so pleased. Miss Baker's fit of ambition was over, and she was content to keep her uncle's house at Hadley, and to see Caroline whenever she could spare a day and get up to London for that purpose.

And the old gentleman was less bearish than she thought he would have been. He occasionally became rusty about shillings and sixpences, and scolded because his niece would have a second fire lighted; but by degrees he forgot even this grievance, and did not make himself more disagreeable or exacting than old age, wealth, and suffering generally are when they come together.

And then when Adela left London, Miss Baker was allowed to ask her to stop with them at Hadley—and Adela did as she was asked. She went direct from Eaton Square to Mr. Bertram's house; and was still there at the time alluded to in the last chapter.

It was on the second morning after Sir Henry's visit to his wife that the postman brought to Miss Baker a letter from Lady Harcourt. The two ladies were sitting at the time over the breakfast-table, and old Mr. Bertram, propped up with pillows, with his crutches close to his hand, was sitting over the fire in his accustomed arm-chair. He did not often get out of it now, except when he was taken away to bed; but yet both his eye and his voice were as sharp as ever when he so pleased; and though he sat there paralyzed and all but motionless, he was still master of his house, and master also of his money.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Miss Baker, with startled voice before her letter had been half read through.

'What's the matter?' demanded Mr. Bertram sharply.

'Oh, Miss Baker! what is it?' asked Adela.

'Goodness gracious! Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!' And Miss Baker, with her handkerchief to her eyes, began to weep most bitterly.

'What ails you? Who is the letter from?' said Mr. Bertram.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear! Read it, Adela. Oh, Mr. Bertram, here is such a misfortune!'

'What is it, Miss Gauntlet? That fool will never tell me.'

Adela took the letter, and read it through.

'Oh, sir,' she said, 'it is indeed a misfortune.'

'Devil take it! what misfortune?'

'Caroline has quarrelled with Sir Henry,' said Miss Baker.

'Oh, is that all?' said Mr. Bertram.

'Ah, sir; I fear this quarrel will prove serious,' said Adela.

'Serious; nonsense; how serious? You never thought, did you, that he and she would live together like turtle doves? He married for money, and she for ambition: of course they'll quarrel.' Such was the wisdom of Mr. Bertram, and at any rate he had experience on his side.

'But, uncle; she wishes to leave him, and hopes that you'll let her come here.'

'Come here—fiddlestick! What should I do here with the wife of such a man as him?'

'She declares most positively that nothing shall induce her to live with him again.'

'Fiddlestick!'

'But, uncle—'

'Why, what on earth did she expect? She

didn't think to have it all sunshine, did she? When she married the man, she knew she didn't care for him; and now she determines to leave him because he won't pick up her pocket-handkerchief! If she wanted that kind of thing, why did not she marry my nephew?"

This was the first time that Mr. Bertram had been heard to speak of George in a tone of affection, and both Miss Baker and Miss Gauntlet were not a little surprised. They had never heard him speak of Caroline as his granddaughter.

During the whole of that day, Mr. Bertram was obdurate; and he positively refused to receive Lady Harcourt at his house unless she came there with the full permission of her husband. Miss Baker, therefore, was obliged to write by the first post, asking for a day's delay before she sent her final answer. But on the next morning a letter reached the old gentleman himself, from Sir Henry. Sir Henry suggested that the loving grandchild should take the occasion of the season being so nearly over to pay a much-desired visit to her loving grandsire. He did not drop the quarrel altogether; but just alluded to it as a passing cloud—an unfortunate cloud certainly, but one that, without doubt, would soon pass away, and leave the horizon more bright than ever.

The matter was at last arranged by Mr. Bertram giving the desired permission. He took no notice himself of Sir Henry's letter, but desired his niece to tell Caroline that she might come there if she liked. So Caroline did come; and Sir Henry gave it out that the London season had been too much for her, and that she, to her deep regret, had been forced to leave town before it was over.

'Sir Omicron was quite imperative,' said Sir Henry, speaking confidentially to his intimate parliamentary friend Mr. Madden; 'and as she was to go, it was as well to do the civil to grand-papa Croesus. I have no time myself; so I must do it by deputy.'

Now Sir Omicron in those days was a great physician.

And so Caroline returned to Hadley; but no bells rang now to greet her coming. Little more than six months had passed since those breakfast speeches had been spoken, in which so much golden prosperity had been promised to bride and bridegroom; and now that vision of gold was at an end; that solid, substantial prosperity had melted away. The bridal dresses of the maids had hardly lost their gloss, and yet all that well-grounded happiness was gone.

'So, you are come back,' said Mr. Bertram.

'Yes, sir,' said Caroline, in a low voice. 'I

have made a mistake in life, and I must hope that you will forgive me.'

'Such mistakes are very foolish. The sooner you unmake it the better.'

'There will be no unmaking this mistake, sir, never—never—never. But I blame no one but myself.'

'Nonsense! you will of course go back to your husband.'

'Never, Mr. Bertram—never! I will obey him, or you, or both, if that be possible, in all things but in that. But in that I can obey no one.'

'Psha!' said Mr. Bertram. Such was Lady Harcourt's first greeting on her return to Hadley.

Neither Miss Baker nor Adela said much to her on the matter on the first day of her arrival. Her aunt, indeed, never spoke openly to her on the subject. It seemed to be understood between them that it should be dropped. And there was occasionally a weight of melancholy about Lady Harcourt, amounting in appearance almost to savage sternness, which kept all inquiry aloof. Even her grandfather hesitated to speak to her about her husband, and allowed her to live unmolested in the quiet, still, self-controlling mood which she seemed to have adopted with a determined purpose.

For the first fortnight she did not leave the house. At the expiration of that time, on one fine sunny Sunday morning she came down dressed for church. Miss Baker remarked that the very clothes she wore were things that had belonged to her before her marriage, and were all of them of the simplest that a woman can wear without making herself conspicuous before the world. All her jewelry she had laid aside, and every brooch, and every ring that had come to her as a married woman, or as a girl about to be married—except that one ring from which an iron fate would not allow her to be parted. Ah, if she could but have laid aside that also !

And then she went to church. There were the same persons there to stare at her now, in her quiet wretchedness, who were there before staring at her in her — triumph may I say ? No, there had been no triumph ; little even then, except wretchedness ; but that misery had not been so open to the public eye.

She went through it very well ; and seemed to suffer even less than did her aunt. She had done nothing to spread abroad among the public of Hadley that fiction as to Sir Omicron's opinion which her lord had been sedulous to disseminate in London. She had said very little about herself, but she had at any rate said nothing false. Nor had she acted falsely ; or so as to give false

impressions. All that little world now around her knew that she had separated herself from her grand husband ; and most of them had heard that she had no intention of returning to him.

She had something, therefore, to bear as she sat out that service ; and she bore it well. She said her prayers, or seemed to say them, as though unconscious that she were in any way a mark for other women's eyes. And when the sermon was over, she walked home with a steady, even step ; whereas Miss Baker trembled at every greeting she received, and at every step she heard.

On that afternoon, Caroline opened her heart to Adela. Hitherto little had passed between them, but those pressings of the hand, those mute marks of sympathy which we all know so well how to give when we long to lighten the sorrows which are too deep to be probed by words. But on this evening after their dinner, Caroline called Adela into her room, and then there was once more confidence between them.

'No, no, Adela, I will never go back to him.' Caroline went on protesting ; 'you will not ask me to do that ?'

'Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder,' said Adela, solemnly.

'Ah, yes ; those whom God *has* joined. But did God join us ?'

'Oh, Caroline ; do not speak so.'

‘But, Adela, do not misunderstand me. Do not think that I want to excuse what I have done; or even to escape the penalty. I have destroyed myself as regards this world. All is over for me here. When I brought myself to stand at that altar with a man I never loved; whom I knew I never could love—whom I never tried, and never would try to love—when I did that, I put myself beyond the pale of all happiness. Do not think that I hope for any release.’ And Lady Harcourt looked stern enough in her resolution to bear all that fate could bring on her.

‘Caroline, God will temper the wind to the shorn lamb, now as always if you will ask him.’

‘I hope so; I hope so, Adela.’

‘Say that you trust so.’

‘I do trust. I trust in this—that He will do what is best. Oh, Adela! if you could know what the last month has been; since he came to the house!’

‘Ah! why did he ever come?’

‘Why, indeed! Did a man ever behave so madly?’

The man she here alluded was Sir Henry Harcourt, not Mr. Bertram.

‘But I am glad of it, dearest; very glad. Is it not better so? The truth has been spoken now. I have told him all.’

‘You mean Sir Henry?’

‘Yes, I told him all before I left. But it was nothing new, Adela. He knew it before. He never dreamed that I loved him. He knew, he must have known that I hated him.’

‘Oh, Caroline, Caroline ! do not speak like that.’

‘And would not you have hated him had you been tied to him ? Now that sin will be over. I shall hate him no longer now.’

‘Such hatred is a crime. Say what you will, he is still your husband.’

‘I deny it. What ! when he called me by that name, was he my husband then ? Was that a husband’s usage ? I must carry his name, and wearily walk with that burden to the grave. Such is my penalty for that day’s sin. I must abandon all hope of living as other women live. I shall have no shoulder on which to lean, hear no words of love when I am sick, have no child to comfort me. I shall be alone, and yet not master of myself. This I must bear because I was false to my own heart. But yet he is not my husband. Listen to me, Adela ; sooner than return to him again, I would put an end to all this world’s misery at once. That would be sinful, but the sin would be lighter than that other sin.’

When she spoke in this way, Adela no longer dared to suggest to her that she and Sir Henry might even yet again live together. In Adela’s own mind, that course, and that alone, would

have been the right one. She looked on such unions as being literally for better or for worse ; and failing to reach the better, she would have done her best, with God's assistance, to bear the worst. But then Adela Gauntlet could never have placed herself in the position which Lady Harcourt now filled.

But greatly as they differed, still there was confidence between them. Caroline could talk to her, and to her only. To her grandfather she was all submission ; to her aunt she was gentle and affectionate ; but she never spoke of her fate with either of them. And so they went on till Adela left them in July ; and then the three that were left behind lived together as quiet a household as might have been found in the parish of Hadley, or perhaps in the county of Middlesex.

During this time Lady Harcourt had received two letters from her husband, in both of which he urged her to return to him. In answer to the first, she assured him, in the civilest words which she knew how to use, that such a step was impossible ; but, at the same time, she signified her willingness to obey him in any other particular, and suggested that as they must live apart, her present home with her grandfather would probably be thought to be the one most suitable for her. In answer to the second, she had simply told him that she must decline any further cor-

respondence with him as to the possibility of her return.

His next letter was addressed to Mr. Bertram. In this he did not go into the matter of their difference at all, but merely suggested that he should be allowed to call at Hadley—with the object of having an interview with Mr. Bertram himself.

‘There,’ said the old man, when he found himself alone with his granddaughter; ‘read that.’ And Caroline did read it. ‘What am I to say to that?’

‘What do you think you ought to say, sir?’

‘I suppose I must see him. He’ll bring an action against me else, for keeping his wife from him. Mind, I tell you, you’ll have to go back to him.’

‘No, sir! I shall not do that,’ said Caroline, very quietly, with something almost like a smile on her face. And then she left him, and he wrote his answer to Sir Henry.

And then Sir Henry came down to Hadley. A day had been named, and Caroline was sore put to it to know how she might best keep out of the way. At last she persuaded her aunt to go up to London with her for the day. This they did, both of them fearing, as they got out of the train and returned to it, that they might unfortunately meet the man they so much dreaded. But

fortune was not so malicious to them ; and when they returned to Hadley they found that Sir Henry had also returned to London.

‘He speaks very fair,’ said Mr. Bertram, who sent for Caroline to come to him alone in the dining-room.

‘Does he, sir?’

‘He is very anxious that you should go back.’

‘Ah, sir, I cannot do that.’

‘He says you shall have the house in Eaton Square to yourself for the next three months.’

‘I shall never go back to Eaton Square, sir.’

‘Or he will take a small place for you anywhere at the sea-side that you may choose.’

‘I shall want no place if you will allow me to remain here.’

‘But he has all your money, you know—your fortune is now his.’

‘Well, sir !’

‘And what do you mean to do ?’

‘I will do what you bid me—except going back to him.’

The old man sat silent for awhile, and then again he spoke.

‘Well, I don’t suppose you know your own mind, as yet.’

‘Oh, sir ! indeed I do.’

‘I say I suppose you don’t. Don’t interrupt me—I have suggested this : that you should

remain here six months, and that then he should come again and see—'

‘You, sir.’

‘Well—see me, if I’m alive: at the end of that time you’ll have to go back to him. Now, good-night.’

And so it was settled; and for the next six months the same dull, dreary life went on in the old house at Hadley.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAIRO.

MEN and women, or I should rather say ladies and gentlemen, used long ago, when they gave signs of weakness about the chest, to be sent to the south of Devonshire ; after that, Madeira came into fashion ; but now they are all despatched to Grand Cairo. Cairo has grown to be so near home, that it will soon cease to be beneficial, and then the only air capable of revigorating the English lungs will be that of Labuan or Jeddo.

But at the present moment, Grand Cairo has the vogue. Now it had so happened during the last winter, and especially in the trying month of March, that Arthur Wilkinson's voice had become weak ; and he had a suspicious cough, and was occasionally feverish, and perspired o' nights ; and on these accounts the Sir Omicron of the Hurst Staple district ordered him off to Grand Cairo.

This order was given in October, with reference to the coming winter, and in the latter end of November, Arthur Wilkinson started for the East. Two articles he had first to seek—the one being a necessary, and the other a luxury—and both he found. These were a curate and a companion. The Reverend Gabriel Gilliflower was his curate; and of him we need only hope that he prospered well, and lived happily under the somewhat stern surveillance of his clerical superior, Mrs. Wilkinson. His companion was George Bertram.

About the end of November they started through France, and got on board the P. and O. Company's vessel at Marseilles. It is possible that there may be young ladies so ignorant as not to know that the P. and O. is the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, and therefore the matter is now explained. In France they did not stop long enough to do more than observe how much better the railway carriages are there than in England, how much dearer the hotels are in Paris than in London, and how much worse they are in Marseilles than in any other known town in the world.

Nor need much be said of their journey thence to Alexandria. Of Malta, I should like to write a book, and may perhaps do so some day; but I shall hardly have time to discuss its sunlight,

and fortifications, and hospitality, and old magnificence, in the fag-end of a third volume ; so we will pass on to Alexandria.

Oh, Alexandria ! mother of sciences ! once the favoured seat of the earth's learning ! Oh, Alexandria ! beloved by the kings ! It is of no use. No man who has seen the Alexandria of the present day can keep a seat on a high horse when he speaks of that most detestable of cities. How may it fitly be described ? May we not say that it has all the filth of the East, without any of that picturesque beauty with which the East abounds ; and that it has also the eternal, grasping, solemn love of lucre which pervades our western marts, but wholly unredeemed by the society, the science, and civilization of the West ?

Alexandria is fast becoming a European city ; but its Europeans are from Greece and the Levant ! ‘ Auri sacra fames !’ is the motto of modern Greece. Of Alexandria it should be, ‘ Auri fames sacrissima ! Poor Arabs ! poor Turks ! giving way on all sides to wretches so much viler than yourselves, what a destiny is before you !

‘ What income,’ I asked a resident in Alexandria, ‘ what income should an Englishman have to live here comfortably ?’ ‘ To live here *comfortably*, you should say ten thousand a year, and

then let him cut his throat first ! Such was my friend's reply.

But God is good, and Alexandria will become a place less detestable than at present. Fate and circumstances must Anglicize it in spite of the huge French consulate, in spite of legions of greedy Greeks ; in spite even of sand, musquitos, bugs, and dirt, of winds from India, and of thieves from Cyprus.

The P. and O. Company will yet be the lords of Egypt ; either that or some other company or set of men banded together to make Egypt a highway. It is one stage on our road to the East ; and the time will soon come when of all the stages it will neither be the slowest nor the least comfortable. The railway from Alexandria to Suez is now all opened within ten miles ; will be all opened before these pages can be printed. This railway belongs to the viceroy of Egypt ; but his passengers are the Englishmen of India, and his paymaster is an English company.

But, for all that, I do not recommend any of my friends to make a long sojourn at Alexandria.

Bertram and Wilkinson did not do so, but passed on speedily to Cairo. They went to the Pharos and to Pompey's Pillar ; inspected Cleopatra's Needle, and the newly excavated so-called Greek church ; watched the high spirits

of one set of passengers going out to India—young men free of all encumbrances, and pretty girls full of life's brightest hopes—and watched also the morose, discontented faces of another set returning home, burdened with babies and tawny-coloured nurses, with silver rings in their toes—and then they went off to Cairo.

There is no romance now, gentle readers, in this journey from Alexandria to Cairo; nor was there much when it was taken by our two friends. Men now go by railway, and then they went by the canal boat. It is very much like English travelling, with this exception, that men dismount from their seats, and cross the Nile in a ferry-boat, and that they pay five shillings for their luncheon instead of sixpence. This ferry does, perhaps, afford some remote chance of adventure, as was found the other day, when a carriage was allowed to run down the bank, in which was sitting a native prince, the heir to the pasha's throne. On that occasion the adventure was important, and the prince was drowned. But even this opportunity for incident will soon disappear; for Mr. Brunel, or Mr. Stephenson, or Mr. Locke, or some other British engineering celebrity, is building a railway bridge over the Nile, and then the modern traveller's heart will be contented, for he will be able to sleep all the way from Alexandria to Cairo.

Mr. Shepheard's hotel at Cairo is to an Englishman the centre of Egypt, and there our two friends stopped. And certainly our countrymen have made this spot more English than England itself. If ever John Bull reigned triumphant anywhere ; if he ever shows his nature plainly marked by rough plenty, coarseness, and good intention, he does so at Shepheard's hotel. If there be anywhere a genuine, old-fashioned John Bull landlord now living, the landlord of the hotel at Cairo is the man. So much for the strange new faces and outlandish characters which one meets with in one's travels.

I will not trouble my readers by a journey up the Nile ; nor will I even take them up a pyramid. For do not fitting books for such purposes abound at Mr. Mudie's ? Wilkinson and Bertram made both the large tour and the little one in proper style. They got as least as far as Thebes, and slept a night under the shade of King Cheops.

One little episode on their road from Cairo to the Pyramids, I will tell. They had joined a party of which the conducting spirit was a missionary clergyman, who had been living in the country for some years, and therefore knew its ways. No better conducting spirit for such a journey could have been found ; for he joined economy to enterprise, and was intent that every-

thing should be seen, and that everything should be seen cheaply.

Old Cairo is a village some three miles from the city, higher up the river ; and here, close to the Nilometer, by which the golden increase of the river is measured, tourists going to the Pyramids are ferried over the river. The tourists are ferried over, as also are the donkeys on which the tourists ride. Now here arose a great financial question. The reis or master of the ferry-boat to which the clerical guide applied was a mighty man, some six feet high, graced with a turban, as Arabs are ; erect in his bearing, with bold eye, and fine, free, supple limbs—a noble reis for that Nile ferry-boat. But, noble as he was, he wanted too many piastres—twopence-halfpenny a head too much for each donkey, with its rider.

And then there arose a great hubbub. The ordinary hubbub at this spot is worse than the worst confusion of any other Babel. For the traffic over the Nile is great, and for every man, woman, and child, for every horse and every ass, for every bundle of grass, for every cock and for every hen, a din of twenty tongues is put in motion, and a perpetual fury rages, as the fury of a hurricane. But the hubbub about the missionary's piastres rose higher than all the other hubbubs. Indeed, those who were quarrelling

before about their own affairs came and stood round in a huge circle, anxious to know how the noble reis and his clerical opponent would ultimately settle this stiff financial difficulty.

In half an hour neither side would yield one point; but then at last the Egyptian began to show that, noble as he looked, he was made of stuff compressible. He gradually gave up, para by para, till he allowed donkeys, men, and women to clamber over the sides of his boat at the exact price named by him of the black coat. Never did the church have a more perfect success.

But the battle was not yet over. No sooner was the vessel pushed off into the stream, than the noble reis declared that necessity compelled him to demand the number of piastres originally named by him. He regretted it, but he assured the clergyman that he had no other alternative.

And now how did it behove an ardent missionary to act in such a contest with a subtle Egyptian? How should the eloquence of the church prevail over this Eastern Mammon? It did prevail very signally. The soldier of peace, scorning further argument in words with such a crafty reis, mindful of the lessons of his youth, raised his right hand, and with one blow between the eyes, laid the Arab captain prostrate on his own deck.

‘There,’ said he, turning to Wilkinson, ‘that is what we call a pastoral visitation in this country. We can do nothing without it.’

The poor reis picked himself up, and picked up also his turban, which had been knocked off, and said not a word more about the piastres. All the crew worked with double diligence at their oars, and the party, as they disembarked from the boat, were treated with especial deference. Even the donkeys were respected. In Egypt the donkeys of a man are respected, ay, and even his donkey-boys, when he shows himself able and willing to knock down all those around him.

A great man there, a native, killed his cook one morning in a rage ; and a dragoman, learned in languages, thus told the story to an Englishman :—‘ De sahib, him vera respecble man. Him kill him cook, Solyman, this morning. Oh, de sahib particklar respecble !’ After all, it may be questioned whether this be not a truer criterion of respectability than that other one of keeping a gig.

Oh, those pyramid guides ! foul, false, cowardly, bullying thieves ! A man who goes to Cairo *must* see the Pyramids. Convention, and the laws of society as arranged on that point, of course require it. But let no man, and, above all, no woman, assume that the excursion will be in any way pleasurable. I have promised that I will not describe such a

visit, but I must enter a loud, a screeching protest against the Arab brutes—the schieks being the very worst of the brutes—who have these monuments in their hands. Their numbers, the filthiness of their dress—or one might almost say no dress—their stench, their obscene indecency, their clattering noise, their rapacity, exercised without a moment's intercession; their abuse, as in this wise: ‘Very bad English-man; dam bad; dam, dam, dam! Him want to take all him money to the grave; but no, no, no! Devil hab him, and money too!’ This, be it remembered, from a ferocious, almost blackened Arab, with his face within an inch of your own. And then their flattery, as in this wise: ‘Good English-man—very good!’—and then a tawny hand pats your face, and your back, and the calves of your leg—‘Him gib poor Arab one shilling for himself—yes, yes, yes! and then Arab no let him tumble down and break all him legs—yes, yes; break *all* him legs.’ And then the patting goes on again. These things, I say, put together, make a visit to the Pyramids no delightful recreation. My advice to my countrymen who are so unfortunate as to visit them is this: Let the ladies remain below—not that they ever will do so, if the gentlemen who are with them ascend—and let the men go armed with stout sticks, and mercilessly belabour

any Arab who attempts either to bully or to wheedle.

Let every Englishman remember this also, that the ascent is not difficult, though so much noise is made about the difficulty as naturally to make a man think that it is so. And let this also be remembered, that nothing is to be gained by entering the pyramid except dirt, noise, stench, vermin, abuse, and want of air. Nothing is to be seen there—nothing to be heard. A man may sprain his ankle, and certainly will knock his head. He will encounter no other delights but these.

But he certainly will come out a wiser man than he went in. He will then be wise enough to know how wretched a place is the interior of a pyramid—an amount of wisdom with which no teaching of mine will imbue him.

Bertram and Wilkinson were sitting beneath the pyramid, with their faces toward the desert, enjoying the cool night air, when they first began to speak of Adela Gauntlet. Hitherto Arthur had hardly mentioned her name. They had spoken much of his mother, much of the house at Hurst Staple, and much also of Lady Harcourt, of whose separation from her husband they were of course aware; but Arthur had been shy of mentioning Adela's name.

They had been speaking of Mrs. Wilkinson, and the disagreeable position in which the vicar

found himself in his own house; when, after sitting silent for a moment, he said, ‘After all, George, I sometimes think that it would have been better for me to have married.’

‘Of course it would—or rather, I should say, will be better. It is what you will do when you return.’

‘I don’t know about my health now.’

‘Your health will be right enough after this winter. I don’t see much the matter with it.’

‘I am better, certainly;’ and then there was another pause.

‘Arthur,’ continued Bertram, ‘I only wish that I had open before me the same chance in life that you have—the same chance of happiness.’

‘Do not despair, George. A short time cures all our wounds.’

‘Yes; a short time does cure them all—and then comes chaos.’

‘I meant a short time in this world.’

‘Well, all things are possible; but I do not understand how mine are to be cured. They have come too clearly from my own folly.’

‘From such folly,’ said Arthur, ‘as always impedes the working of human prudence.’

‘Do you remember, Arthur, my coming to you the morning after the degrees came down—when you were so low in spirits because you had broken down—when I was so full of triumph?’

'I remember the morning well; but I do not remember any triumph on your part.'

'Ah! I was triumphant—triumphant in my innermost heart. I thought then that all the world must give way to me, because I had taken a double-first. And now—I have given way before all the world. What have I done with all the jewels of my youth? Thrown them before swine!'

'Come, George; you are hardly seven-and-twenty yet.'

'No, hardly; and I have no profession, no fortune, no pursuit, and no purpose. I am here, sitting on the broken stone of an old tomb, merely because it is as well for me to be here as elsewhere. I have made myself to be one as to whose whereabouts no man need make inquiry—and no woman. If that black, one-eyed brute, whom I thrashed a-top of the pyramid, had stuck his knife in me, who would have been the worse for it? You, perhaps—for six weeks or so.'

'You know there are many would have wept for you.'

'I know but one. She would have wept, while it would be ten times better that she should rejoice. Yes, she would weep; for I have marred her happiness as I have marred my own. But who cares for me, of whose care I can be proud? Who is anxious for me, whom I can dare to thank, whom I may dare to love?'

'Do we not love you at Hurst Staple?'

'I do not know. But I know this, that you ought to be ashamed of me. I think Adela Gauntlet is my friend; that is, if in our pig-headed country a modest girl may love a man who is neither her brother nor her lover.'

'I am sure she is,' said Arthur; and then there was another pause. 'Do you know,' he continued, 'I once thought—'

'Thought what?'

'That you were fond of Adela.'

'So I am, heartily fond of her.'

'But I mean more than that.'

'You once thought that I would have married her if I could. That is what you mean.'

'Yes,' said Wilkinson, blushing to his eyes. But it did not matter; for no one could see him.

'Well; I will make a clean breast of it, Arthur. Men can talk here, sitting in the desert, who would be as mute as death at home in England. Yes; there was once a moment, once *one* moment, in which I would have married her—a moment in which I flattered myself that I could forget Caroline Waddington. Ah! if I could tell you how Adela behaved!'

'How did she behave? Tell me—what did she say?' said Arthur, with almost feverish anxiety.

'She bade me remember, that those who dare

to love must dare to suffer. She told me that the wounded stag, "that from the hunter's aim has ta'en a hurt," must endure to live, "left and abandoned of his velvet friends."—And she told me true. I have not all her courage; but I will take a lesson from her, and learn to suffer—quietly, without a word, if that be possible.'

'Then you did propose to her?'

'No; hardly that. I cannot tell what I said myself; but 'twas thus she answered me.'

'But what do you mean by taking a lesson from her? Has she any such suffering?'

'Nay! You may ask her. I did not.'

'But you said so just now; at any rate you left me to infer it. Is there any one whom Adela Gauntlet really loves?'

George Bertram did not answer the question at once. He had plighted his word to her as her friend that he would keep her secret; and then, moreover, that secret had become known to him by mere guesses. He had no right, by any law, to say it as a fact that Adela Gauntlet was not heart-whole. But still he thought that he would say so. Why should he not do something towards making these two people happy?

'Do you believe that Adela is really in love with any one?' repeated Arthur.

'If I tell you that, will you tell me this—Are you in love with any one—you yourself?'

The young clergyman was again ruby red up to his forehead. He could dare to talk about Adela, but hardly about himself.

'I in love!' he said at last. 'You know that I have been obliged to keep out of that kind of thing. Circumstanced as I have been, I could not marry.'

'But that does not keep a man from falling in love.'

'Does not it?' said Arthur, rather innocently.

'That has not preserved me—nor, I presume, has it preserved you. Come, Arthur, be honest; if a man with thirty-nine articles round his neck can be honest. Out with the truth at once. Do you love Adela, or do you not?'

But the truth would not come out so easily. Whether it was the thirty-nine articles, or the natural modesty of the man's disposition, I will not say; but he did not find himself at the moment able to give a downright answer to this downright question. He would have been well pleased that Bertram should know the whole truth; but the task of telling it went against the grain with him.

'If you do, and do not tell her so,' continued Bertram, when he found that he got no immediate reply, 'I shall think you—. But no; a man must be his own judge in such matters, and of all men I am the least fit to be a judge o

others. But I would that it might be so, for both your sakes.'

'Why, you say yourself that she likes some one else.'

'I have never said so. I have said nothing like it. There; when you get home, do you yourself ask her whom she loves. But remember this—if it should chance that she should say that it is you, you must be prepared to bear the burden, whatever may be urged to the contrary at the vicarage. And now we will retire to roost in this hole of ours.'

Arthur had as yet made no reply to Bertram's question; but as he crept along the base of the pyramid, feeling his steps among the sand and loose stones, he did manage to say a word or two of the truth.

'God bless you, George. I do love her—very dearly.' And then the two cousins understood each other.

It has been said that Alexandria has nothing of an Eastern town but its filth. This cannot at all be said of Cairo. It may be doubted whether Bagdad itself is more absolutely oriental in its appurtenances. When once the Englishman has removed himself five hundred yards from Shepheard's hotel, he begins to feel that he is really in the East. Within that circle, although it contains one of the numerous huge buildings appro-

priated to the viceroy's own purposes, he is still in Great Britain. The donkey-boys curse in English, instead of Arabic ; the men you meet sauntering about, though they do wear red caps, have cheeks as red ; and the road is broad and macadamized, and Britannic. But anywhere beyond that circle Lewis might begin to paint.

Cairo is a beautiful old city ; so old in the realities of age that it is crumbling into dust on every side. From time to time the houses are patched up, but only patched ; and, except on the Britannic soil above alluded to, no new houses are built. It is full of romance, of picturesque oriental wonders, of strange sights, strange noises, and strange smells. When one is well in the town, every little narrow lane, every turn—and the turns are incessant—every mosque and every shop creates fresh surprise. But I cannot allow myself to write a description of Cairo.

How the dervishes there spun and shook, going through their holy exercises with admirable perseverance, that I must tell. This occurred towards the latter end of the winter, when Wilkinson and Bertram had nearly completed their sojourn in Cairo. Not but what the dervishes had roared out their monotonous prayer to Allah, duly every Friday, at 1 P.M., with as much precision as a service in one of your own cathedrals ;

but our friends had put the thing off, as hardly being of much interest, and at last went there when they had only one Friday left for the performance.

I believe that, as a rule, a Mahomedan hates a Christian: regarding him merely as Christian, he certainly does so. Had any tidings of confirmed success on the part of the rebels in India reached the furthermost parts of the Turkish empire, no Christian life would have been safe there. The horrid outrage perpetrated at Jaffa, and the massacre at Jeddah, sufficiently show us what we might have expected. In Syria no Christian is admitted within a mosque, for his foot and touch are considered to carry pollution.

But in Egypt we have caused ourselves to be better respected: we thrash the Arabs and pay them, and therefore they are very glad to see us anywhere. And even the dervishes welcome us to their most sacred rites, with excellent coffee, and a loan of rush-bottomed chairs. Now, when it is remembered that a Mahomedan never uses a chair, it must be confessed that this is very civil. Moreover, let it be said to their immortal praise, that the dervishes of Cairo never ask for backsheish. They are the only people in the country that do not.

So Bertram and Wilkinson had their coffee with sundry other travelling Britons who were

there ; and then each, with his chair in his hand went into the dervishes' hall. This was a large, lofty, round room, the roof of which was in the shape of a cupola ; on one side, that which pointed towards Mecca, and therefore nearly due east, there was an empty throne, or tribune, in which the head of the college, or dean of the chapter of dervishes, located himself on his haunches. He was a handsome, powerful man, of about forty, with a fine black beard, dressed in a flowing gown, and covered by a flat-topped black cap.

By degrees, and slowly, in came the college of the dervishes, and seated themselves as their dean was seated ; but they sat on the floor in a circle, which spread away from the tribune, getting larger and larger in its dimensions as fresh dervishes came in. There was not much attention to regularity in their arrival, for some appeared barely in time for the closing scene.

The commencement was tame enough. Still seated, they shouted out a short prayer to Allah a certain number of times. The number was said to be ninety-nine. But they did not say the whole prayer at once, though it consisted of only three words. They took the first word ninety-nine times ; and then the second ; and then the third. The only sound to be recognized was that of Allah ; but the deep guttural tone in which this was groaned out by all the voices

together, made even that anything but a distinct word.

And so this was completed, the circle getting ever larger and larger. And it was remarked that men came in as dervishes who belonged to various ordinary pursuits and trades ; there were soldiers in the circle, and, apparently, common labourers. Indeed, any one may join ; though I presume he would do so with some danger were it discovered that he were not a Mahomedan.

Those who specially belonged to the college had peculiar gowns and caps, and herded together on one side of the circle ; and it appeared to our friends, that throughout the entertainment they were by far the least enthusiastic of the performers.

When this round of groaning had been completed—and it occupied probably half an hour—a young lad, perhaps of seventeen years, very handsome, and handsomely dressed in a puce-coloured cloak, or rather petticoat, with a purple hat on his head, in shape like an inverted flower-pot, slipped forth from near the tribune into the middle of the circle, and began to twirl. After about five or six minutes, two other younger boys, somewhat similarly dressed, did the same, and twirled also ; so that there were three twirling together.

But the twirling of the elder boy was by far the more graceful. Let any young lady put out both her hands, so as to bring the one to the level of her waist, and the other with the crown of her head, and then go round and round, as nearly as possible on the same spot ; let her do this so that no raising of either foot shall ever be visible ; and let her continue it for fifteen minutes, without any variation in the attitude of her arms, or any sign of fatigue,—and then she may go in for a twirling dervish. It is absurd to suppose that any male creature in England could perform the feat. During this twirling, a little black boy marked the time, by beating with two sticks on a rude gong.

This dance was kept up at first for fifteen minutes. Then there was another short spell of howling ; then another dance, or twirl ; and then the real game began.

The circle had now become so large as to occupy the greater part of the hall, and was especially swelled by sundry new arrivals at this moment. In particular, there came one swarthy, tall, wretched-looking creature, with wild eyes, wan face, and black hair of extraordinary length, who took up his position, standing immediately opposite to the tribune. Other new comers also stood near him, all of whom were remarkable for the length of their hair. Some of them had it

tied up behind like women, and now proceeded to unloose it.

But at this period considerable toilet preparations were made for the coming work. All those in the circle who had not come in from the college with gowns and caps, and one or two even of them, deliberately took off their outer clothing, and tied it up in bundles. These bundles they removed to various corners, so that each might again find his own clothes. One or two put on calico dressing-gowns, which appeared to have been placed ready for the purpose ; and among these was the cadaverous man of the black hair.

And then they all stood up, the dean standing also before his tribune, and a deep-toned murmur went round the circle. This also was the word Allah, as was duly explained to Bertram by his dragoman ; but without such explanation it would have been impossible to detect that any word was pronounced. Indeed, the sound was of such nature as to make it altogether doubtful from whence it came. It was like no human voice, or amalgamation of voices ; but appeared as though it came from the very bowels of the earth. At first it was exceedingly low, but it increased gradually, till at last one might have fancied that the legions of Lucifer were groaning within the very bowels of Pandemonium.

And also, by slow degrees, a motion was seen to pervade the circle. The men, instead of standing fixedly on their legs, leaned over, first to the right and then to the left, all swaying backwards and forwards together in the same direction, so that both sound and motion were as though they came from one compact body.

And then, as the groan became louder, so did the motion become more violent, till the whole body heaved backwards and forwards with the regularity of a pendulum and the voice of a steam-engine. As the excitement became strong, the head of the dervishes walked along the inner circle, exciting those to more violence who already seemed the most violent. This he did, standing for a few minutes before each such man, bowing his own head rapidly and groaning deeply; and as he did so, the man before whom he stood would groan and swing himself with terrible energy. And the men with the long hair were especially selected.

And by degrees the lateral motion was abandoned, and the dervishes bowed their heads forwards instead of sideways. No one who has not seen the operation can conceive what men may achieve in the way of bowing and groaning. They bowed till they swept the floor with their long hair, bending themselves double, and after each motion bringing themselves up again to an

erect posture. And the dean went backwards and forwards from one to another, urging them on.

By this time the sight was terrible to behold. The perspiration streamed down them, the sounds came forth as though their very hearts were bursting, their faces were hidden by their dishevelled locks, whatever clothes they wore were reeking wet. But still they flung themselves about, the motion becoming faster and faster; and still the sounds came forth as though from the very depths of Tartarus. And still the venerable dean went backwards and forwards slowly before them, urging them on, and still urging them on.

But at last, nature with the greater number of them had made her last effort; the dean retired to his tribune, and the circle was broken up. But those men with the long hair still persevered. It appeared, both to Bertram and Wilkinson, that with them the effort was now involuntary. They were carried on by an ecstatic frenzy; either that or they were the best of actors. The circle had broken up, the dervishes were lying listlessly along the walls, panting with heat, and nearly lifeless with their exertions; but some four, remaining with their feet fixed in the old place, still bowed and still howled.

‘They will die,’ said Bertram.

‘Will they not be stopped?’ said Wilkinson to their dragoman.

‘Five minutes, five minutes!’ said the dragoman. ‘Look at him—look at him with the black hair!’ And they did look.

Three of them had now fallen, and the one remained still at his task. He swept the ground with his hair, absolutely striking it with his head; and the sounds came forth from him loudly, wildly, with broken gasps, with terrible exertion, as though each would be his last, and yet they did nothing to repress him.

At last it seemed as though the power of fully raising his head had left him, and also that of lowering it to the ground. But still he made as it were a quarter-circle. His hands were clutched behind his back, and with this singular motion, and in this singular attitude, he began to move his feet; and still groaning and half bowing, he made a shuffling progress across the hall.

The dervishes themselves appeared to take no notice of him. The dean stood tranquil under his tribune; those who had recovered from their exertions were dressing themselves, the others lay about collecting their breath. But the eyes of every stranger were on the still moving black-haired devotee.

On he went, still howling and still swinging his head, right towards the wall of the temple.

His pace was not fast, but it seemed as though he would inevitably knock his own brains out by the motion of his own head ; and yet nobody stopped him.

‘He’ll kill himself,’ said Wilkinson.

‘No, no, no !’ said the dragoman ; ‘him no kill —him head berry hard.’

Bertram rushed forward as though to stay the infuriate fanatic, but one or two of the dervishes who stood around gently prevented him, without speaking a word.

And then the finale came. Crack he went against the wall, rebounded off, and went at it again, and then again. They were no mock blows, but serious, heavy raps, as from a small battering-ram. But yet both Bertram and Wilkinson were able to observe that he did not strike the wall, as he would naturally have done had there been no precaution. Had he struck it with his head in motion, as was intended to be believed, the blow would have come upon his forehead and temples, and must probably have killed him ; but instead of this, just as he approached the wall, he butted at it like a ram, and saved his forehead at the expense of his pole. It may probably be surmised, therefore, that he knew what he was about.

After these three raps, the man stood, still doubled up, but looking as though he were stag-

gered. And then he went again with his head towards the wall. But the dean, satisfied with what had been done, now interposed, and this best of dervishes was gently laid on his back upon the floor, while his long matted hair was drawn from off his face. As he so lay, the sight was not agreeable to Christian eyes, whatever a true Mahomedan might think of it.

'Twas thus the dervishes practised their religious rites at Cairo. 'I wonder how much that black fellow gets paid every Friday,' said Bertram, as he mounted his donkey; 'it ought to be something very handsome.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO WIDOWS.

THE winter was now nearly over, and the travellers had determined to return to England. Whatever other good purpose the city of Cairo might or might not serve, it had restored Wilkinson to health. Bertram was sufficiently weary of living in a country in which the women go about with their faces hidden by long dirty stripes of calico, which they call veils, and in which that little which is seen of the ladies by no means creates a wish to see more. And Wilkinson, since the conversation which they had had at the Pyramids, was anxious to assume his own rights in the vicarage-house at Hurst Staple. So they decided on returning about the middle of March; but they decided also on visiting Suez before doing so.

In these days men go from Cairo to Suez as they do from London to Birmingham—by railway; in those days—some ten or twelve years

back, that is—they went in wooden boxes, and were dragged by mules through the desert.

We cannot stay long at Suez, nor should I carry my reader there, even for a day, seeing how triste and dull the place is, had not our hero made an acquaintance there which for some time was likely to have a considerable effect on his future life.

Suez is indeed a triste, unhappy, wretched place. It is a small oriental town, now much be-Europeanized, and in the process of being be-Anglicized. It is not so Beelzebub-ridden a spot as Alexandria, nor falling to pieces like Cairo. But it has neither water, air, nor verdure. No trees grow there, no rivers flow there. Men drink brine and eat goats; and the thermometer stands at eighty in the shade in winter. The oranges are the only luxury. There is a huge hotel, which contains long rows of hot cells, and a vast cave in which people eat. The interest of the place consists in Pharaoh's passage over the Red Sea; but its future prosperity will be caused by a transit of a different nature:—the passage of the English to and from India will turn even Suez into an important town.

Here the two travellers encountered a flood of Indians on their return home. The boat from Calcutta came in while they were there, and suddenly all the cells were tenanted, and the caye

was full of spoiled children, tawny nurses, pale languid mothers, and dyspeptic fathers. These were to be fellow-travellers homewards with Bertram and Wilkinson.

Neither of our friends regarded with favour the crowd which made them even more uncomfortable than they had been before. As Englishmen in such positions generally do, they kept themselves aloof and scowled, frowned at the children who whined in the nearest neighbourhood to them, and listened in disgust to the continuous chatter about punkahs, tiffins, and bungalows.

But close to them, at the end of the long table, at the common dinner, sat two ladies, on whom it was almost impossible for them to frown. For be it known that at these hotels in Egypt, a man cannot order his dinner when he pleases. He must breakfast at nine, and dine at six, as others do—or go without. And whether he dine, or whether he do not, he must pay. The Medes and Persians were lax and pliable in their laws in comparison with these publicans.

Both George and Arthur would have frowned if they could have done so; but on these two ladies it was impossible to frown. They were both young, and both pretty. George's neighbour was uncommonly pretty—was, indeed, one of the prettiest women that he had ever seen;—that any man could see anywhere. She was full

of smiles too, and her smile was heavenly ;— was full of words, and her words were witty. She who sat next Arthur was perhaps less attractive ; but she had large soft eyes, which ever and anon she would raise to his face, and then let fall again to her plate in a manner which made sparks fly round the heart even of our somewhat sombre young Hampshire vicar.

The four were soon in full conversation, apparently much to the disgust of two military-looking gentlemen who sat on the other side of the ladies. And it was evident that the military gentlemen and the ladies were, or ought to be, on terms of intimacy ; for proffers of soup, and mutton, and wine were whispered low, and little attempts at confidential intercourse were made. But the proffers were rejected, and the attempts were in vain. The ladies preferred to have their plates and glasses filled by the strangers, turned their shoulders on their old friends with but scant courtesy, and were quite indifferent to the frowns which at last clouded those two military brows.

And the brows of Major Biffin and Captain M'Gramm were clouded. They had been filling the plates and glasses of these two ladies all the way from Calcutta ; they had walked with them every day on deck, had fetched their chairs, picked up their handkerchiefs, and looked after

their bottled beer at tiffin-time with an assiduity which is more than commendable in such warm latitudes. And now to be thrown on one side for two travelling Englishmen, one in a brown coat and the other in a black one—for two muffs, who had never drunk sangaree or sat under a punkah !

This was unpleasant to Major Biffin and Captain M'Gramm. But then why had the major and the captain boasted of the favours they had daily received, to -that soft-looking, superannuated judge, and to their bilious friend, Dr. O'Shaughnessy ? The judge and the doctor had of course their female allies, and had of course repeated to them all the boasts of the fortunate major and of the fortunate captain. And was it not equally of course that these ladies should again repeat the same to Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price ? For she who was so divinely perfect was Mrs. Cox, and she of the soft, lustrous eyes was Mrs. Price. Those who think that such a course was not natural know little of voyages home from Calcutta to Southampton.

But the major, who had been the admirer of Mrs. Cox, had done more than this—had done worse, we may say. The world of the good ship ‘Lahore,’ which was bringing them all home, had declared ever since they had left Point de Galle, that the major and Mrs. Cox were engaged.

Now, had the major, in boasting of his favours, boasted also of his engagement, no harm perhaps might have come of it. The sweet good-nature of the widow might have overlooked that offence. But he had boasted of the favours and pooh-poohed the engagement! ‘*Hinc illæ lacrymæ.*’ And who shall say that the widow was wrong? And as to the other widow, Mrs. Price, she was tired of Captain M‘Gramm. A little fact had transpired about Captain M‘Gramm, namely, that he was going home to his wife. And therefore the two ladies, who had conspired together to be civil to the two warriors, now conspired together to be uncivil to them. In England such things are done, as it were, behind the scenes: there these little quarrels are managed in private. But a passage home from India admits of but little privacy; there is no behind the scenes. The two widows were used to this, and quarrelled with their military admirers in public without any compunction.

‘*Hinc illæ lacrymæ.*’ But the major was not inclined to shed his tears without an effort. He had pooh-poohed the idea of marrying Mrs. Cox; but like many another man in similar circumstances, he was probably willing enough to enter into such an arrangement now that the facility of doing so was taken from him. It is possible that Mrs. Cox, when she turned her pretty shoul-

der on Major Biffin, may herself have understood this phasis of human nature.

The major was a handsome man, with well-brushed hair, well-trimmed whiskers, a forehead rather low, but very symmetrical, a well-shaped nose, and a small, pursy mouth. The worst of his face was that you could by no means remember it. But he knew himself to be a handsome man, and he could not understand how he could be laid aside for so ugly a lout as this stranger from England. Captain M'Gramm was not a handsome man, and he was aware that he fought his battle under the disadvantage of a wife. But he had impudence enough to compensate him for this double drawback.

During this first dinner, Arthur Wilkinson was not more than coldly civil to Mrs. Price; but Bertram became after a while warmly civil to Mrs. Cox. It is so very nice to be smiled on by the prettiest woman in the room; and it was long since he had seen the smile of any pretty woman! Indeed, for the last eighteen months he had had but little to do with such smiles.

Before dinner was over, Mrs. Cox had explained to Bertram that both she and her friend Mrs. Price were in deep affliction. They had recently lost their husbands—the one, by cholera; that was poor dear Cox, who had been collector of the Honourable Company's taxes at Panjabee.

Whereas, Lieutenant Price, of the 71st Native Bengal Infantry, had succumbed to—here Mrs. Cox shook her head, and whispered, and pointed to the champagne-glass which Bertram was in the act of filling for her. Poor Cox had gone just eight months ; but Price had taken his last glass within six. And so Bertram knew all about it.

And then there was a great fuss in packing the travellers into the wooden boxes. It seems that they had all made up their own parties by sixes, that being the number of which one box was supposed to be capable. But pretty women are capricious, and neither Mrs. Price nor Mrs. Cox were willing to abide by any such arrangement. When the time came for handing them in, they both objected to the box pointed out to them by Major Biffin—refused to be lifted in by the arms of Captain M'Gramm—got at last into another vacant box with the assistance of our friends—summoned their dingy nurses and babies into the same box (for each was so provided)—and then very prettily made way for Mr. Bertram and Mr. Wilkinson. And so they went across the desert.

Then they all stayed a night at Cairo, and then they went on to Alexandria. And by the time that they were embarked in a boat together, on their way to that gallant first-class steamer, the ‘Cagliari,’ they were as intimate as though

they had travelled round the world together, and had been as long about it as Captain Cook.

‘What will you take with you, Mrs. Cox?’ said Bertram, as he stood up in the boat with the baby on one arm, while with the other he handed the lady towards the ship’s ladder.

‘A good ducking,’ said Mrs. Cox, ‘with a cheery laugh, as at the moment a dashing wave covered them with its spray. ‘And I’ve got it too, with a vengeance. Ha! ha! Take care of the baby, whatever you do; and if she falls over, mind you go after her.’ And with another little peal of silver ringing laughter, she tripped up the side of the ship, and Bertram, with the baby, followed after her.

‘She is such a giddy thing,’ said Mrs. Price, turning her soft eyes on poor Arthur Wilkinson. ‘Oh, laws! I know I shall be drowned. Do hold me.’ And Arthur Wilkinson did hold her, and nearly carried her up into the ship. As he did so, his mind would fly off to Adela Gauntlet; but his arms and legs were not the less at the service of Mrs. Price.

‘And now look after the places,’ said Mrs. Cox; ‘you haven’t a moment to lose. And look here, Mr. Bertram, mind, I won’t sit next to Major Biffin. And, for heaven’s sake, don’t let us be near that fellow M’Gramm.’ And so Bertram descended into the *salon* to place

their cards in the places at which they were to sit for dinner. ‘Two and two; opposite to each other,’ sang out Mrs. Cox, as he went. There was a sweetness in her voice, a low, mellow cheeriness in her tone, which, combined with her beauty, went far to atone for the nature of what she said; and Bertram not unwillingly obeyed her behests.

‘Oh, my blessed baby!’ said Mrs. Price, as the nurse handed her the child—which, however, she immediately handed back. ‘How can I thank you enough, Mr. Wilkinson? What should we have done without you? I wonder whether it’s near tiffin. I am so faint.’

‘Shall I fetch you anything?’ said he.

‘If you could get me a glass of porter. But I don’t think they’ll give it you. They are so uncivil!'

Arthur went for the beer; but went in vain. The steward said that lunch would be ready at twelve o’clock.

‘They are such brutes!’ said Mrs. Price. ‘Well, I suppose I must wait.’ And she again turned her eyes upon Arthur, and he again thought of Adela Gauntlet.

And then there was the ordinary confusion of a starting ship. Men and women were hurrying about after their luggage, asking all manner of unreasonable questions. Ladies were complaining

of their berths, and servants asking where on hearth they were to sleep. Gentlemen were swearing that they had been shamefully doubled up—that is, made to lie with two or three men in the same cabin ; and friends were contriving to get commodious seats for dinner. The officers of the ship were all busy, treating with apparent indifference the thousand questions that were asked them on every side ; and all was bustle, confusion, hurry, and noise.

And then they were off. The pistons of the engine moved slowly up and down, the huge cranks revolved, and the waters under the bow rippled and gave way. They were off, and the business of the voyage commenced. The younger people prepared for their flirtations, the mothers unpacked their children's clothes, and the elderly gentlemen lighted their cigars.

‘ What very queer women they are ! ’ said Arthur, walking the deck with his cousin.

‘ But very pretty, and very agreeable. I like them both.’

‘ Don’t you think them too free and easy ? ’

‘ Ah, you must not judge of them by women who have lived in England, who have always had the comfort of well-arranged homes. They have been knocked about, ill used, and forced to bear hardships as men bear them ; but still there is about them so much that is charming. They are so frank ! ’

‘Yes, very frank,’ said Arthur.

‘It is well to see the world on all sides,’ said George. ‘For myself, I think that we are lucky to have come across them — that is, if Major Biffin does not cut my throat.’

‘I hope Captain M‘Gramm won’t cut mine. He looked as though he would.’

‘Did you ever see such an ass as that Biffin? I don’t wonder that she has become sick of him; and then he has behaved so very badly to her. I really do pity her. She has told me all about it.’

‘And so has Mrs. Price told me all about Captain M‘Gramm.’

‘Has she? Well! It seems that he, Biffin, has taken advantage of her frank, easy manner, and talked of her to every man in the ship. I think she has been quite right to cut him.’ And so they discussed the two ladies.

And at last Mrs. Price got her porter, and Mrs. Cox got her pale ale. ‘I do like pale ale,’ said she; ‘I suppose it’s vulgar, but I can’t help that. What amuses me is, that so many ladies drink it who are quite ashamed to say they like it.’

‘They take it for their health’s sake,’ said Bertram.

‘Oh, yes; of course they do. Mrs. Bangster takes her half-pint of brandy every night for her health’s sake, no doubt. Would you believe it, Mr. Bertram, the doctor absolutely had to take

her out of the saloon one night in the 'Lahore?' Didn't he, Mrs. Price?

'Indeed he did. I never was so shocked.—Just a little drop more to freshen it.' And Mr. Wilkinson gave her another glass of porter.

Before they reached Malta, all the passengers from India had agreed that Mrs. Cox and Bertram would certainly make a match of it, and that Wilkinson was also in danger.

'Did you ever see such flirts?' said Mrs. Bangster to Dr. O'Shaughnessey. 'What an escape Biffin has had!'

'She is a deuced pretty woman, Mrs. Bangster; and I'll tell you what: Biffin would give one of his eyes to get her back again if he could.'

'Laws, doctor! You don't mean to tell me that he ever meant to marry that thing?'

'I don't know what he meant before; but he would mean it now, if he got the opportunity.'

Here Captain M'Gramm joined them. 'Well, Mac,' said the doctor, 'what news with the widow?'

'Widow! they'd all be widows if they could, I believe.'

'Indeed, I wouldn't, for one,' said Mrs. Bangster. 'B. is a deal too well off where he is. Ha! ha! ha!'

'But what about Mrs. Price—eh, Mac?' continued the doctor.

‘There she is. You’d better go and ask her yourself. You don’t suppose I ever cared about such a woman as that? Only I do say this: if she goes on behaving herself in that way, some one ought to speak to the captain.’

But Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price went on their own way, heeding such menaces not at all; and by the time they had reached Malta, they had told the whole history of their lives to the two gentlemen—and perhaps something more.

At Malta they remained about six hours, and the four dined on shore together. Bertram bought for them Maltese veils and bad cameos; and Wilkinson, misled by such an example, was forced to do the same. These treasures were not hidden under a bushel when they returned to the ship; and Dr. O’Shaughnessey, Mrs. Bangster, the fat judge, and a host of others, were more sure than ever that both the widows were re-engaged.

And Arthur Wilkinson was becoming frightened in his mind. ‘Upon my word,’ said he, as he and George were walking the deck at sunrise the next morning, ‘upon my word, I am getting very tired of this woman, and I really think we are making a show of ourselves.’

‘Making a show of ourselves! What do you mean?’

‘Why, walking with them every day, and always sitting next to them.’

‘As to sitting next to them, we can’t help that. Everybody always sits in the same place, and one must sit next some one ; and it wouldn’t be kind to leave them to walk alone.’

‘I think we may overdo it, you know.’

‘Ah, well,’ said George, ‘you have some one else to think about. I have no one, unless it be this widow. She is kind to me, and as to what the world says, I care nothing about it.’

On that day Wilkinson was busy with his books, and did not walk with Mrs. Price—a piece of neglect which sat uneasily on that lady’s mind. But at ten o’clock, as usual, Bertram was pacing the deck with Mrs. Cox.

‘What is the matter with your friend ?’ said she.

‘Oh, nothing. He is home-sick, I suppose.’

‘I hope he has not quarrelled with Minnie.’ For the two ladies had come to call each other by their Christian names when they were in company with the gentlemen ; and Bertram had once or twice used that of Mrs. Cox, not exactly in speaking to her, but in speaking of her in her presence.

‘Oh dear, no,’ said Bertram.

‘Because it is so odd he should not give her his arm as usual. I suppose you will be treating me so as we draw nearer to Southampton ?’ And she looked up at him with a bewitching smile, and pressed gently on his arm, and then let her eyes fall upon the deck.

My brother, when you see these tricks played upon other men, the gall rises black within your breast, and you loudly condemn wiles which are so womanly, but which are so unworthy of women. But how do you feel when they are played upon yourself? The gall is not so black, the condemnation less loud; your own merit seems to excuse the preference which is shown you; your heart first forgives and then applauds. Is it not so, my brother, with you? So it was, at least, with George Bertram.

‘What! treating you with neglect, because we are soon to part?’

‘Yes, exactly so; just that; because we are soon to part. That is what makes it so bitter. We have been such good friends, haven’t we?’

‘And why should we not remain so? Why should we talk of parting? We are both going to England.’

‘England! Yes, but England is a large place. Come, let us lean on the taffrail, and look at the dolphins. There is that horrid fellow eyeing me, as he always does; Major Biffin, I mean. Is he not exactly like a barber’s block? I do so hate him!’

‘But he doesn’t hate you, Mrs. Cox.’

‘Doesn’t he? Well then, he may if he likes. But don’t let’s talk of him. Talk to me about England, Mr. Bertram. Sometimes I do so long to be there—and then sometimes I don’t.’

‘ You don’t—why not ?’

‘ Do you ?’

‘ No, I do not ; I tell you frankly. I’d sooner be here with you to talk to, with you to look at.’

‘ Psha, Mr. Bertram ! what nonsense ! I can’t conceive that any woman can ever be worth looking at on board a ship — much less such a one as I ! I know you’re dying to get home.’

‘ I might be if I had a home.’

‘ Is your home with that uncle of yours ?’ She had heard so much of his family ; but he had as yet spoken to her no word about Caroline. ‘ I wonder what he would say if he could see you now leaning here and talking to me.’

‘ If he has any knowledge of human nature, he would say that I was a very happy fellow.’

‘ And are you ?’ As she asked him, she looked up into his face with such an arch smile that he could not find it in his heart to condemn her.

‘ What will you think of my gallantry if I say no ?’

‘ I hate gallantry ; it is all bosh. I wish I were a man, and that I could call you Bertram, and that you would call me Cox.’

‘ I would sooner call you Annie.’

‘ Would you ? But that wouldn’t be right, would it ?’ And her hand, which was still within his arm, was pressed upon it with ever so light a pressure.

‘ I don’t know why it should be wrong to call people by their Christian names. Should you be angry if I called you Annie ?’

‘ That might depend——Tell me this, Mr. Bertram : How many other ladies do you call by their Christian names ?’

‘ A dozen or two.’

‘ I’ll be bound you do.’

‘ And may I add you to the number ?’

‘ No, Mr. Bertram ; certainly not.’

‘ May I not ? So intimate as we have become, I thought—’

‘ I will not be one of a dozen or two.’ And as she answered him, she dropped her tone of raillyery, and spoke in a low, soft, sweet voice. It sounded so sweet on Bertram’s ear.

‘ But if there be not one—not one other ; not one other now—what then, Annie ?’

‘ Not one other now ?—Did you say now ? Then there has been one.’

‘ Yes ; there has been one.’

‘ And she—what of her ?’

‘ It is a tale I cannot tell.’

‘ Not to me ? I should not like you the less for telling me. Do tell me.’ And she pressed her hand again upon his arm. ‘ I have known there was something that made you unhappy.’

‘ Have you ?’

‘ Oh, yes. I have long known that. And I

have so wished to be a comfort to you—if I could. I, too, have had great suffering.'

'I am sure you have.'

'Ah! yes. I did not suffer less because he had been unkind to me.' And she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and then brought her hand again upon his arm. 'But tell me of her—your one. She is not your one now—is she, Mr. Bertram?'

'No, Annie; not now.'

'Is she—?' And she hesitated to ask whether the lady were dead, or married to some one else. It might, after all, only be a lovers' quarrel.

'I drove her from me—and now she is a wife.'

'Drove her from you! Alas! alas!' said Mrs. Cox, with the sweetest emphasis of sympathy. But the result of her inquiries was not unsatisfactory to her.

'I don't know why I should have told you this,' said he.

'I am so glad you have,' she replied.

'But now that I have told you—'

'Well—'

'Now may I call you Annie?'

'You have done so two or three times.'

'But may I?'

'If it please you, you may.' And the words, though whispered very low, fell clearly upon his ear.

‘ Dearest Annie !’

‘ But I did not say you might call me that.’

‘ But you are.’

‘ Am I ?’

‘ Dearest—all but she. Will that make you angry with me ?’

‘ No, not angry ; but—’

‘ But what ?’

She looked up at him, pouting with her lip. There was a half-smile on her mouth, and half a tear in her eyes ; and her shoulder leant against him, and her heart palpitated. She had never been so beautiful, never so attractive.

‘ But what—? What would you say, Annie ?’

‘ I would say this.—But I know you will think me very bold.’

‘ I shall not think you too bold if you will say the truth.’

‘ Then I would say this—that if I loved a man, I could love him quite as fondly as she loved you.’

‘ Could you, Annie ?’

‘ I could. But he should not drive me from him, as you say you did her ; never—never—never. He might kill me if he would ; but if I once had told him that I loved him, I would never leave him afterwards.’

‘ Tell me so, Annie.’

‘ No, Mr. Bertram. We have not known each

other long enough.' And now she took her hand from his arm, and let it drop by her side.

'Tell me so, dear Annie,' he repeated; and he tried to regain her hand.

'There is the luncheon-bell; and since Mr. Wilkinson won't go to Mrs. Price, I must do so.'

'Shall I go?' said he.

'Do; I will go down by myself.'

'But you love me, Annie?—say that you love me.'

'Nonsense. Here is that fellow, Biffin. Do you go for Mrs. Price—leave me to myself.'

'Don't go down stairs with him.'

'You may be sure I won't—nor with you either this morning. I am half inclined to be angry with you.' And so saying, she moved away.

'Ah, me! what have I done!' said Bertram to himself, as he went upon his mission. 'But she is a sweet creature; as beautiful as Hebe; and why should I be wretched for ever?'

She had moved towards the companion-ladder, and as she did so, Major Biffin followed her.

'Will you not allow me to give you an arm down stairs?' said he.

'Thank you, Major Biffin. It is rather crowded, and I can go better alone.'

'You did not find the stairs in the "Lahore" too crowded.'

‘Oh, yes, I did ; very often. And the “Lahore” and the “Cagliari” are different things.’

‘Very different it seems. But the sea itself is not so fickle as a woman.’ And Major Biffin became a picture of injured innocence.

‘And the land is not so dry as a man, Major Biffin ; that is, some men. Ha ! ha ! ha ! Good-morning, Major Biffin.’ And so saying, she went down by herself.

On the next day, Arthur still preferred his book to walking with Mrs. Price ; and that lady was once again seen with her arm in that of Captain M‘Gramm’s. This made a considerable consternation in the ship ; and in the afternoon there was a slight quarrel between the two ladies.

‘And so, Minnie, you are going to take up with that fellow again ?’

‘No ; I am not. But I don’t choose to be left altogether to myself.’

‘I never would have anything to say to a married man that drops his wife as he does.’

‘I don’t care two straws for him, or his wife. But I don’t want to make myself conspicuous by a quarrel.’

‘I’m sure Wilkinson will be annoyed,’ said Mrs. Cox.

‘He’s a muff,’ said Mrs. Price. ‘And, if I am not mistaken, I know some one else who is another.’

‘Who do you mean, Mrs. Price?’

‘I mean Mr. Bertram, Mrs. Cox.’

‘Oh, I dare say he is a muff; that’s because he’s attentive to me instead of leaving me to myself, as somebody does to somebody else. I understand all about that, my dear.’

‘You understand a great deal, I have no doubt,’ said Mrs. Price. ‘I always heard as much.’

‘It seems to me you understand nothing, or you wouldn’t be walking about with Captain M’Gramm,’ said Mrs. Cox. And then they parted, before blood was absolutely drawn between them.

At dinner that day they were not very comfortable together. Mrs. Price accepted Mr. Wilkinson’s ordinary courtesies in a stately way, thanking him for filling her glass and looking after her plate, in a tone and with a look which made it plain to all that things were not progressing well between them. George and his Annie did get on somewhat better; but even they were not quite at their ease. Mrs. Cox had said, before luncheon, that she had not known Mr. Bertram long enough to declare her love for him. But the hours between luncheon and dinner might have been a sufficient prolongation of the period of their acquaintance. George, however, had not repeated the question; and had, indeed,

not been alone with her for five minutes during the afternoon.

That evening, Wilkinson again warned his friend that he might be going too far with Mrs. Cox ; that he might say that which he could neither fulfil nor retract. For Wilkinson clearly conceived it to be impossible that Bertram should really intend to marry this widow.

'And why should I not marry her ?' said George.

'She would not suit you, nor make you happy.'

'What right have I to think that any woman will suit me ? or what chance is there that any woman will make me happy ? Is it not all leather and prunella ? She is pretty and clever, soft and feminine. Where shall I find a nicer toy to play with ? You forget, Arthur, that I have had my day-dreams, and been roused from them somewhat roughly. With you, the pleasure is still to come.'

After this they turned in and went to bed.

CHAPTER X.

REACHING HOME.

EARLY in their journeyings together, Mrs. Cox had learned from George that he was possessed of an eccentric old uncle; and not long afterwards, she had learned from Arthur that this uncle was very rich, that he was also childless, and that he was supposed to be very fond of his nephew. Putting all these things together, knowing that Bertram had no profession, and thinking that therefore he must be a rich man, she had considered herself to be acting with becoming prudence in dropping Major Biffin for his sake.

But on the day after the love scene recorded in the last chapter, a strange change came over the spirit of her dream. ‘I am a very poor man,’ Bertram had said to her, after making some allusion to what had taken place.

‘If that were all, that would make no difference with me,’ said Mrs. Cox, magnanimously.

'If that were all, Annie! What does that mean?'

'If I really loved a man, I should not care about his being poor. But your poverty is what I should call riches, I take it.'

'No, indeed. My poverty is absolute poverty. My own present income is about two hundred a year.'

'Oh, I don't understand the least about money myself. I never did. I was such a child when I was married to Cox. But I thought, Mr. Bertram, your uncle was very rich.'

'So he is; as rich as a gold-mine. But we are not very good friends—at any rate, not such friends as to make it probable that he will leave me a farthing. He has a granddaughter of his own.'

This, and a little more of the same kind, taught Mrs. Cox that it behoved her to be cautious. That Major Biffin had a snug little income over and above that derived from his profession was a fact that had been very well ascertained. That he was very dry, as dry as a barber's block, might be true. That George Bertram was an amusing fellow, and made love in much better style than the major, certainly was true. But little as she might know about money, Mrs. Cox did know this—that when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window; that eating and

drinking are stern necessities ; that love in a cottage is supposed to be, what she would call, bosh ; and that her own old home used to be very unpleasant when Cox was in debt, and those eastern Jewish harpies would come down upon him with his overdue bills. Considering all this, Mrs. Cox thought it might be well not to ratify her engagement with Mr. Bertram till after they should reach Southampton. What if Biffin—the respectable Biffin—should again come forward !

And so they went on for a few days longer. Bertram, when they were together, called her Annie, and once again asked her whether she loved him. ‘Whether I do, or whether I do not, I shall give you no answer now,’ she had said, half laughing. ‘We have both been very foolish already, and it is time that we should begin to have our senses. Isn’t it ?’ But still she sat next him at dinner, and still she walked with him. Once, indeed, he found her saying a word to Major Biffin, as that gentleman stood opposite to her chair upon the deck. But as soon as the major’s back was turned, she said to Bertram, ‘I think the barber’s block wants to be new curled, doesn’t it ? I declare the barber’s man has forgotten to comb out it’s whiskers.’ So that Bertram had no ground for jealousy of the major.

Somewhere about this time, Mrs. Price deserted

them at dinner. She was going to sit, she said, with Mrs. Bangster, and Dr. Shaughnessey, and the judge. Mrs. Bangster had made a promise to old Mr. Price in England to look after her; and, therefore, she thought it better to go back to Mrs. Bangster before they reached Southampton. They were now past Gibraltar. So on that day, Mrs. Price's usual chair at dinner was vacant, and Wilkinson, looking down the tables, saw that room had been made for her next to Dr. Shaughnessey. And on her other side, sat Captain M'Gramm, in despite of Mrs. Bangster's motherly care and of his own wife at home. On the following morning, Mrs. Price and Captain M'Gramm were walking the deck together just as they had been used to do on the other side of Suez.

And so things went on till the day before their arrival at Southampton. Mrs. Cox still kept her seat next to Bertram, and opposite to Wilkinson, though no other lady remained to countenance her. She and Bertram still walked the deck arm in arm; but their whisperings were not so low as they had been, nor were their words so soft, nor, indeed, was the temper of the lady so sweet. What if she should have thrown away all the advantages of the voyage! What if she had fallen between two stools! She began to think that it would be better to close with one or with

the other—with the one despite his poverty, or with the other despite his head.

And now it was the evening of the last day. They had sighted the coast of Devonshire, and the following morning would see them within the Southampton waters. Ladies had packed their luggage; subscriptions had been made for the band; the captain's health had been drunk at the last dinner; and the mail boxes were being piled between the decks.

'Well, it is nearly over,' said Mrs. Cox, as she came upon deck after dinner, warmly cloaked. 'How cold we all are!'

'Yes; it is nearly over,' answered Bertram. 'What an odd life of itself one of these voyages is! How intimate people are who will never see each other again!'

'Yes; that is the way, I suppose. Oh, Mr. Bertram!'

'Well, what would you have?'

'Ah, me! I hardly know. Fate has ever been against me, and I know that it will be so to the last.'

'Is it not cold?' said Bertram, buttoning up a greatcoat as he spoke.

'Very cold! very cold!' said Mrs. Cox. 'But there is something much colder than the weather—very much colder.'

'You are severe, Mrs. Cox.'

'Yes. It is Mrs. Cox here. It was Annie when we were off Gibraltar. That comes of being near home. But I knew that it would be so. I hate the very idea of home.' And she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

She had had her chance as far as Bertram was concerned, and had let it pass from her. He did not renew his protestations; but in lieu of doing so, lit a cigar, and walked away into the fore-part of the vessel. 'After all, Arthur is right,' said he to himself; 'marriage is too serious a thing to be arranged in a voyage from Alexandria to Southampton.'

But luckily for Mrs. Cox, everybody did not think as he did. He had gone from her ruthlessly, cruelly, falsely, with steps which sounded as though there were triumph in his escape, and left her seated alone near the skylights. But she was not long alone. As she looked after him along the deck, the head of Major Biffin appeared to her, emerging from the saloon stairs. She said nothing to herself now about barber's blocks or uncurled whiskers.

'Well, Mrs. Cox,' said the major, accosting her.

'Well, Major Biffin;' and the major thought that he saw in her eye some glimpse of the smile as of old.

'We are very near home now, Mrs. Cox,' said the major.

‘Very near indeed,’ said Mrs. Cox. And then there was a slight pause, during which Major Biffin took an opportunity of sitting down not very far from his companion.

‘I hope you have enjoyed your voyage,’ said he.

‘Which voyage?’ she asked.

‘Oh! your voyage home from Alexandria—your voyage since you made the acquaintance of Mr.—what’s his name, the parson’s cousin?’

‘Mr. What’s-his-name, as you call him, is nothing to me, I can assure you, Major Biffin. His real name, however, is Bertram. He has been very civil when some other people were not inclined to be so, that is all.’

‘Is that all? The people here do say—’

‘Then I tell you what, Major Biffin, I do not care one straw what the people say—not one straw. You know whose fault it has been if I have been thrown with this stranger. Nobody knows it as well. And mind this, Major Biffin, I shall always do as I like in such matters without reference to you or to any one else. I am my own mistress.’

‘And do you mean to remain so?’

‘Ask no questions, and then you’ll be told no stories.’

‘That’s civil.’

‘If you don’t like it, you had better go, for there’s more to follow of the same sort.’

‘ You are very sharp to-night.’

‘ Not a bit sharper than I shall be to-morrow.’

‘ One is afraid even to speak to you now.’

‘ Then one had better hold one’s tongue.’

Mrs. Cox was receiving her suitor rather sharply; but she probably knew his disposition. He did not answer her immediately, but sat biting the top of his cane. ‘ I’ll tell you what it is, Mrs Cox,’ he said at last, ‘ I don’t like this kind of thing.’

‘ Don’t you, Mr. Biffin? And what kind of thing do you like?’

‘ I like you.’

‘ Psha! Tell me something new, if you must tell me anything.’

‘ Come, Annie; do be serious for a moment. There isn’t much time left now, and I’ve come to you in order that I may get a plain answer.’

‘ If you want a plain answer, you’d better ask a plain question. I don’t know what you mean.’

‘ Will you have me? That’s a plain question, or the deuce is in it.’

‘ And what should I do with you?’

‘ Why, be Mrs. Biffin, of course.’

‘ Ha! ha! ha! And it has come to that, has it? What was it you said to Dr. O’Shaughnessy when we were off Point de Galle?’

‘ Well, what did I say?’

‘ I know what you said well enough. And so

do you, too. If I served you right, I should never speak to you again.'

'A man doesn't like to be humbugged, you know, before a whole shipful of people,' said the major, defending himself.

'And a woman likes it just as little, Major Biffin; please to remember that.'

'Well; I'm sure you've been down upon me long enough.'

'Not a bit longer than you deserved. You told O'Shaughnessey, that it was all very well to amuse yourself, going home. I hope you like your amusement now. I have liked mine very well, I can assure you.'

'I don't think so bad of you as to believe you care for that fellow.'

'There are worse fellows than he is, Major Biffin. But there, I have had my revenge; and now if you have anything to say, I'll give you an answer.'

'I've only to say, Annie, that I love you better than any woman in the world.'

'I may believe as much of that as I like.'

'You may believe it all. Come, there's my hand.'

'Well, I suppose I must forgive you. There's mine. Will that please you?'

Major Biffin was the happiest man in the world, and Mrs. Cox went to her berth that night not

altogether dissatisfied. Before she did so, she had the major's offer in writing in her pocket; and had shown it to Mrs. Price, with whom she was now altogether reconciled.

'I only wish, Minnie, that there was no Mrs. M'Gramm,' said she.

'He wouldn't be the man for me at all, my dear; so don't let that fret you.'

'There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught yet; eh, Minnie?'

'Of course there are. Though of course you think there never was such a fish as Biffin.'

'He'll do well enough for me, Minnie; and when you catch a bigger, and a better, I won't begrudge him you.'

That night Mrs. Cox took her evening modicum of creature-comforts sitting next to her lover, the major; and our two friends were left alone by themselves. The news had soon spread about the ship, and to those ladies who spoke to her on the subject, Mrs. Cox made no secret of the fact. Men in this world catch their fish by various devices; and it is necessary that these schemes should be much studied before a man can call himself a fisherman. It is the same with women; and Mrs. Cox was an Izaak Walton among her own sex. Had she not tied her fly with skill, and thrown her line with a steady hand, she would not have had her trout in her basket.

There was a certain amount of honour due to her for her skill, and she was not ashamed to accept it.

'Good-night, Mrs. Cox,' Bertram said to her that evening, with a good-humoured tone; 'I hear that I am to congratulate you.'

'Good-night,' said she, giving him her hand. 'And I'll say good-bye, too, for we shall all be in such a flurry to-morrow morning. I'm sure you think I've done the right thing—don't you? And, mind this, I shall hope to see you some day.' And so saying, she gave him a kindly grasp, and they parted. 'Done right!' said Bertram; 'yes, I suppose she has; right enough at least as far as I am concerned. After all, what husband is so convenient as a barber's block?'

On the following morning they steamed up the Southampton river, and at nine o'clock they were alongside the quay. All manner of people had come on board in boats, and the breakfast was eaten in great confusion. But few of the ladies were to be seen. They had tea and rolls in their own cabins, and did not appear till the last moment. Among these were Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price.

These ladies during their journey home had certainly not been woe-begone, either in personal appearance or in manner. And who would have

the heart to wish that they should be so? They had been dressed as young ladies on board ship usually do dress, so that their widowhood had been forgotten; and, but for their babies, their wifehood might have been forgotten also.

But now they were to be met by family friends—by friends who were thinking of nothing but their bereavements. Old Mr. Price came to meet them on board, and Mrs. Cox's uncle; old gentlemen with faces prepared for sadness, and young ladies with sympathetic handkerchiefs. How signally surprised the sad old gentlemen and the sympathetic young ladies must have been!

Not a whit! Just as our friends were about to leave the ship that morning, with all their luggage collected round them, they were startled by the apparition of two sombre female figures, buried in most sombre tokens of affliction. Under the deep crape of their heavy black bonnets were to be seen that chieftest sign of heavy female woe—a widow's cap. What signal of sorrow that grief holds out, ever moves so much as this? Their eyes were red with weeping, as could be seen when, for a moment, their deep bordered handkerchiefs were allowed to fall from their faces. Their eyes were red with weeping, and the agonizing grief of domestic bereavement sat chiselled on every feature. If you stood near enough,

your heart would melt at the sound of their sobs.

Alas! that forms so light, that creatures so young, should need to be shrouded in such vestments! They were all crape, that dull, weeping, widow's crape, from the deck up to their shoulders. There they stood, monuments of death, living tombs, whose only sign of life was in their tears. There they stood, till they might fall, vanquished by the pangs of memory, into the arms of their respective relations.

They were Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price. Bertram and Wilkinson, as they passed them, lifted their hats and bowed, and the two ladies observing them, returned their salutation with the coldest propriety.

CHAPTER XI.

I COULD PUT A CODICIL.

ON their journey up from Southampton, George and Arthur parted from each other. George went on direct to London, whereas Arthur turned off from Basingstoke towards his own home.

'Take my advice now, if you never do again,' said Bertram, as they parted; 'make yourself master of your own house, and as soon after as possible make her the mistress of it.'

'That's easily said, old fellow,' repeated the other.

'Make the attempt, at any rate. If I am anything of a prophet, it won't be in vain;' and so they parted.

At Southampton they had learnt that there had been a partial crash in the government. The prime minister had not absolutely walked forth, followed by all his satellites, as is the case when a successful turn in the wheel gives the outs a full whip-hand over the ins, but it had become neces-

sary to throw overboard a brace or two of Jonahs, so that the ship might be lightened to meet a coming storm ; and among those so thrown over had been our unfortunate friend Sir Henry Harcourt.

And this, as regards him, had hardly been the worst of it. We all know that bigwigs are never dismissed. When it becomes necessary to get rid of them, they resign. Now resignation is clearly a voluntary act, and it seemed that Sir Henry, having no wish that way, had not at first performed this act of volition. His own particular friends in the cabinet, those to whom he had individually attached himself, were gone ; but, nevertheless, he made no sign ; he was still ready to support the government, and as the attorney-general was among those who had shaken the dust from their feet and gone out, Sir Henry expected that he would, as a matter of course, walk into that gentleman's shoes.

But another learned gentleman was appointed, and then at last Sir Henry knew that he must go. He had resigned ; but no resignation had ever appeared to have less of volition in it. And how could it be otherwise ? Political success was everything to him ; and, alas ! he had so played his cards that it was necessary to him that that success should be immediate. He was not as those are who, in losing power, lose a costly

plaything, which they love indeed over well, but the loss of which hurts only their pride. Place to him was everything ; and feeling this, he had committed that most grievous of political sins—he had endeavoured to hold his place longer than he was wanted. Now, however, he was out. So much, in some sort of way, Bertram had learnt before he left Southampton.

His first business in London was to call on Mr. Pritchett.

‘Oh, master George ! oh, master George !’ began that worthy man, as soon as he saw him. His tone had never been so lachrymose, nor his face so full of woe. ‘Oh, master George !’

Bertram in his kindest way asked after his uncle.

‘Oh, master George ! you shouldn’t be going to them furren parts—indeed you shouldn’t ; and he in such a state.’

‘Is he worse than when I last saw him, Mr. Pritchett ?’

‘Gentlemen at his time of life don’t get much better, master George—nor yet at mine. It’s half a million of money ; half—a—million—of—money ! But it’s no use talking to you, sir—it never was.’

By degrees Bertram gathered from him that his uncle was much weaker, that he had had a second and a much more severe attack of paralysis, and that according to all the doctors, the old gentle-

man was not much longer for this world. Sir Omicron himself had been there. Miss Baker had insisted on it, much in opposition to her uncle's wishes. But Sir Omicron had shaken his head and declared that the fiat had gone forth.

Death had given his order ; the heavy burden of the half-million must be left behind, and the soul must walk forth, free from all its toils, to meet such æthereal welcome as it could find.

Mr. Bertram had been told, and had answered, that he supposed as much. ‘A man when he was too old to live must die,’ he had said, ‘though all the Sir Omicrons in Europe should cluster round his bed. It was only throwing money away. What, twenty pounds !’ And being too weak to scold, he had turned his face to the wall in sheer vexation of spirit. Death he could encounter like a man ; but why should he be robbed in his last moments ?

‘ You’ll go down to him, master George,’ wheezed out poor Pritchett. ‘ Though it’s too late for any good. It’s all arranged now, of course.’

Bertram said that he would go down immediately, irrespective of any such arrangements. And then, remembering of whom that Hadley household had consisted when he left England in the early winter, he asked as to the two ladies.

‘ Miss Baker is there, of course ?’

'Oh, yes, Miss Baker is there. She doesn't go to any furren parts, master George.'

'And—and—'

'Yes, she's in the house, too—poor creature—poor creature!'

'Then how am I to go there?' said George, speaking rather to himself than to Mr. Pritchett.

'What! you wouldn't stay away from him now because of that? You ought to go to him, master George, though there were ten Lady Harcourts there—or twenty.' This was said in a tone that was not only serious, but full of melancholy. Mr. Pritchett had probably never joked in his life, and had certainly never been less inclined to do so than now, when his patron was dying, and all his patron's money was to go into other and into unknown hands.

Some other information Bertram received from his most faithful ally. Sir Henry had been three times to Hadley, but he had only once succeeded in seeing Mr. Bertram, and then the interview had been short, and, as Mr. Pritchett surmised, not very satisfactory. His last visit had been since that paid by Sir Omicron, and on that occasion the sick man had sent out to say that he could not see strangers. All this Mr. Pritchett had learnt from Miss Baker. Sir Henry had not seen his wife since that day—now nearly twelve months since—on which she had separated herself

from him. He had made a formal application to her to return to him, but nothing had come of it; and Mr. Pritchett took upon himself to surmise again, that Sir Henry was too anxious about the old gentleman's money to take any steps that could be considered severe, until—. And then Mr. Pritchett wheezed so grievously that what he said was not audible.

George immediately wrote to Miss Baker, announcing his return, and expressing his wish to see his uncle. He did not mention Lady Harcourt's name; but he suggested that perhaps it would be better, under existing circumstances, that he should not remain at Hadley. He hoped, however, that his uncle would not refuse to see him, and that his coming to the house for an hour or so might not be felt to be an inconvenience. By return of post he got an answer from Miss Baker, in which she assured him that his uncle was most anxious for his presence, and had appeared to be more cheerful, since he had heard of his nephew's return, than he had been for the last two months. As for staying at Hadley, George could do as he liked, Miss Baker said. But it was but a sad household, and perhaps it would be more comfortable for him to go backwards and forwards by the railway.

This correspondence caused a delay of two days, and on one of them Bertram received a

visit which he certainly did not expect. He was sitting in his chamber alone, and was sad enough, thinking now of Mrs. Cox and his near escape, then of Adela and his cousin's possible happiness, and then of Caroline and the shipwreck of her hopes, when the door opened, and Sir Henry Harcourt was standing before him.

'How d'ye do, Bertram?' said the late solicitor-general, putting out his hand. The attitude and the words were those of friendship, but his countenance was anything but friendly. A great change had come over him. His look of youth had deserted him, and he might have been taken for a care-worn, middle-aged man. He was thin, and haggard, and wan; and there was a stern, harsh frown upon his brow, as though he would wish to fight if he only dared. This was the successful man—fortune's pet, who had married the heiress of the millionaire, and risen to the top of his profession with unexampled rapidity.

'How are you, Harcourt?' said Bertram, taking the proffered hand. 'I had no idea that you had heard of my return.'

'Oh, yes; I heard of it. I supposed you'd be back quick enough when you knew that the old man was dying.'

'I am glad, at any rate, to be here in time to see him,' said George, disdaining to defend himself against the innuendo.

‘ When are you going down ?’

‘ To-morrow, I suppose. But I expect to have a line from Miss Baker in the morning.’

Sir Henry, who had not sat down, began walking up and down the room, while Bertram stood with his back to the fire watching him. The lawyer’s brow became blacker and blacker, and as he rattled his half-crowns in his trouser-pockets, and kept his eyes fixed upon the floor, Bertram began to feel that the interview did not promise to be one of a very friendly character.

‘ I was sorry to hear, Harcourt, that you are among the lot that have left the Government,’ said Bertram, hardly knowing what else to say.

‘ D—— the Government ! But I didn’t come here to talk about the Government. That old man down there will be gone in less than a week’s time. Do you know that ?’

‘ I hear that in all probability he has not long to live.’

‘ Not a week. I have it from Sir Omicron himself. Now I think you will admit, Bertram, that I have been very badly used.’

‘ Upon my word, my dear fellow, I know nothing about it.’

‘ Nonsense !’

‘ But it isn’t nonsense. I tell you that I know nothing about it. I suppose you are alluding to

my uncle's money ; and I tell you that I know nothing—and care nothing.'

' Psha ! I hate to hear a man talk in that way. I hate such humbug.'

' Harcourt, my dear fellow—'

' It is humbug. I am not in a humour now to stand picking my words. I have been infernally badly used—badly used on every side.'

' By me, among others ?'

Sir Henry, in his present moody mind, would have delighted to say, ' Yes,' by him, Bertram, worse, perhaps, than by any other. But it did not suit him at the present moment to come to an open rupture with the man whom he had been in such a hurry to visit.

' I treated that old man with the most unbounded confidence when I married his granddaughter—'

' But how does that concern me ? She was not my granddaughter. I, at least, had nothing to do with it. Excuse me, Harcourt, if I say that I, of all men, am the last to whom you should address yourself on such a subject.'

' I think differently. You are his nearest relative—next to her ; next to her, mind—'

' Well ! What matter is it whether I am near or distant ? Lady Harcourt is staying with him. Did it suit her to do so, she could fight your battle, or her own battle, or any battle that she pleases '

‘Yours, for instance?’

‘No, Sir Henry. That she could not do. From doing that she is utterly debarred. But I tell you once for all that I have no battle. You shall know more—if the knowledge will do you any good. Not very long since my uncle offered to settle on me half his fortune if I would oblige him in one particular. But I could not do the thing he wanted; and when we parted, I had his positive assurance that he would leave me nothing. That was the last time I saw him.’ And as Bertram remembered what that request was to which he had refused to accede, his brow also grew black.

‘Tell me honestly, then, if you can be honest in the matter, who is to have his money?’

‘I can be very honest, for I know nothing. My belief is that neither you nor I will have a shilling of it.’

‘Well, then; I’ll tell you what. Of course you know that Lady Harcourt is down there?’

‘Yes; I know that she is at Hadley.’

‘I’ll not submit to be treated in this way. I have been a deuced sight too quiet, because I have not chosen to disturb him in his illness. Now I will have an answer from him. I will know what he means to do; and if I do not know by to-morrow night, I will go down, and will, at any rate, bring my wife away with me.

I wish you to tell him that I want to know what his intentions are. I have a right to demand as much.'

'Be that as it may, you have no right to demand anything through me.'

'I have ruined myself—or nearly so, for that woman.'

'I wonder, Harcourt, that you do not see that I am not the man you should select to speak to on such a subject.'

'You are the man, because you are her cousin. I went to enormous expense to give her a splendid home, knowing, of course, that his wealth would entitle her to it. I bought a house for her, and furnished it as though she were a duchess—'

'Good heavens, Harcourt! Is this anything to me? Did I bid you buy the house? If you had not given her a chair to sit on, should I have complained? I tell you fairly, I will have nothing to do with it.'

'Then it will be the worse for her—that's all.'

'May God help her! She must bear her lot, as must I mine, and you yours.'

'And you refuse to take my message to your uncle?'

'Certainly. Whether I shall see him or not I do not yet know. If I do, I certainly shall not

speak to him about money unless he begins. Nor shall I speak about you, unless he shall seem to wish it. If he asks about you, I will tell him that you have been with me.'

After some further discussion, Harcourt left him. George Bertram found it difficult to understand what motive could have brought him there. But drowning men catch at straws. Sir Henry was painfully alive to the consideration, that if anything was to be done about the rich man's money, if any useful step could be taken, it must be done at once; the step must be taken now. In another week, perhaps in another day, Mr. Bertram would be beyond the power of will-making. No bargain could then be driven in which it should be stipulated that after his death his grandchild should be left unmolested—for a consideration. The bargain, if made at all, must be made now—now at once.

It will be thought that Sir Henry would have played his game better by remaining quiet; that his chance of being remembered in that will would be greater if he did not now make himself disagreeable. Probably so. But men running hither and thither in distress do not well calculate their chances. They are too nervous, too excited to play their game with judgment. Sir Henry Harcourt had now great trouble on his shoulders: he was in debt, was pressed for money on every

side, had brought his professional bark into great disasters—nearly to utter shipwreck—and was known to have been abandoned by his wife. The world was not smiling on him. His great hope, his once strong hope, was now buried in those Hadley coffers ; and it was not surprising that he did not take the safest way in his endeavours to reach those treasures which he so coveted.

On the following morning, George received Miss Baker's letter, and very shortly afterwards he started for Hadley. Of course he could not but remember that Lady Harcourt was staying there ; that she would naturally be attending upon her grandfather, and that it was all but impossible that he should not see her. How were they to meet now ? When last they had been together, he had held her in his arms, had kissed her forehead, had heard the assurance of her undying love. How were they to meet now ?

George was informed by the servant who came to the door that his uncle was very ill. 'Weaker to-day,' the girl said, 'than ever he had been.' 'Where was Miss Baker ?' George asked. The girl said that Miss Baker was in the dining-room. He did not dare to ask any further question. 'And her ladyship is with her grandfather,' the girl added ; upon hearing which George walked with quicker steps to the parlour door.

Miss Baker met him as though there had been no breach in their former intimacy. With her, for the moment, Lady Harcourt and her troubles were forgotten, and she thought only of the dying man upstairs.

'I am so glad you have come!' she said. 'He does not say much about it. You remember he never did talk about such things. But I know that he will be delighted to see you. Sometimes he has said that he thought you had been in Egypt quite long enough.'

'Is he so very ill, then?'

'Indeed he is; very ill. You'll be shocked when you see him: you'll find him so much altered. He knows that it cannot last long, and he is quite reconciled.'

'Will you send up to let him know that I am here?'

'Yes, now—immediately. Caroline is with him;' and then Miss Baker left the room.

Caroline is with him! It was so singular to hear her mentioned as one of the same family with himself; to have to meet her as one sharing the same interests with him, bound by the same bonds, anxious to relieve the same suffering. She had said that they ought to be as far as the poles asunder; and yet fortune, unkind fortune, would bring them together! As he was thinking of this, the door opened gently, and she was in the room with him,

She, too, was greatly altered. Not that her beauty had faded, or that the lines of her face were changed ; but her gait and manners were more composed ; her dress was so much more simple, that, though not less lovely, she certainly looked older than when he had last seen her. She was thinner too, and, in the light-gray silk which she wore, seemed to be taller, and to be paler too.

She walked up to him, and putting out her hand, said some word or two which he did not hear ; and he uttered something which was quite as much lost on her, and so their greeting was over. Thus passed their first interview, of which he had thought so much in looking forward to it for the last few hours, that his mind had been estranged from his uncle.

‘ Does he know I am here ?’

‘ Yes. You are to go up to him. You know the room ?’

‘ The same he always had ?’

‘ Oh, yes ; the same.’ And then, creeping on tiptoe, as men do in such houses, to the infinite annoyance of the invalids whom they wish to spare, he went upstairs, and stood by his uncle’s bed.

Miss Baker was on the other side, and the sick man’s face was turned towards her. ‘ You had better come round here, George,’ said she. ‘ It would trouble Mr. Bertram to move.’

'She means that I can't stir,' said the old man, whose voice was still sharp, though no longer loud. 'I can't turn round that way. Come here.' And so George walked round the bed.

He literally would not have known his uncle, so completely changed was the face. It was not only that it was haggard, thin, unshorn, and gray with coming death ; but the very position of the features had altered. His cheeks had fallen away ; his nose was contracted ; his mouth, which he could hardly close, was on one side. Miss Baker told George afterwards that the left side was altogether motionless. George certainly would not have known his uncle—not at the first glance. But yet there was a spark left in those eyes, of the old fire ; such a spark as had never gleamed upon him from any other human head. That look of sharpness, which nothing could quench, was still there. It was not the love of lucre which was to be read in those eyes, so much as the possessor's power of acquiring it. It was as though they said, 'Look well to all you have ; put lock and bar to your stores ; set dragons to watch your choice gardens ; fix what man-traps you will for your own protection. In spite of everything, I will have it all ! When I go forth to rob, no one can stay me !' So had he looked upon men through all his long life, and so now did he

look upon his nephew and his niece as they stood by to comfort him in his extremity.

'I am sorry to see you in this state,' said George, putting his hand on to that of his uncle's, which was resting on the bed.

'Thank'ee, George, thank'ee. When men get to be as old as I am, they have nothing for it but to die. So you've been to Egypt, have you? What do you think about Egypt?'

'It is not a country I should like to live in, sir.'

'Nor I to die in, from all that I hear of it. Well, you're just in time to be in at the last gasp —that's all, my boy.'

'I hope it has not come to that yet, sir.'

'Ah, but it has. How long a time did that man give me, Mary—he that got the twenty pounds? They gave a fellow twenty pounds to come and tell me that I was dying! as if I didn't know that without him.'

'We thought it right to get the best advice we could, George,' said poor Miss Baker.

'Nonsense!' said the old man, almost in his olden voice. 'You'll find by-and-by that twenty pounds are not so easy to come by. George, as you are here, I might as well tell you about my money.'

George begged him not to trouble himself about such a matter at present; but this was by no means the way in which to propitiate his uncle,

‘And if I don’t talk of it now, when am I to do it? Go away, Mary—and look here—come up again in about twenty minutes. What I have got to say won’t take me long.’ And so Miss Baker left the room.

‘George,’ said his uncle, ‘I wonder whether you really care about money? sometimes I have almost thought that you don’t.’

‘I don’t think I do very much, sir.’

‘Then you must be a great fool.’

‘I have often thought I am, lately.’

‘A very great fool. People preach against it, and talk against it, and write against it, and tell lies against it; but don’t you see that everybody is fighting for it? The parsons all abuse it; but did you ever know one who wouldn’t go to law for his tithes? Did you ever hear of a bishop who didn’t take his dues?’

‘I am quite fond enough of it, sir, to take all that I can earn.’

‘That does not seem to be much, George. You haven’t played your cards well—have you, my boy?’

‘No, uncle; not very well. I might have done better.’

‘No man is respected without money—no man. A poor man is always thrust to the wall—always. Now you will be a poor man, I fear, all your life.’

‘Then I must put up with the wall, sir.’

‘But why were you so harsh with me when I wanted you to marry her? Do you see now what you have done? Look at her, and what she might have been. Look at yourself, and what you might have been. Had you done that, you might have been my heir in everything.’

‘Well, sir, I have made my bed, and I must lie upon it. I have cause enough for regret—though, to tell the truth, it is not about your money.’

‘Ah, I knew you would be stiff to the last,’ said Mr. Bertram, angry that he could not move his nephew to express some sorrow about the half-million.

‘Am I stiff, sir? Indeed, I do not mean it.’

‘No, it’s your nature. But we will not quarrel at the last; will we, George?’

‘I hope not, sir. I am not aware that we have ever quarrelled. You once asked me to do a thing which, had I done it, would have made me a happy man—’

‘And a rich man also.’

‘And I fairly tell you now, that I would I had done as you would have had me. That is not being stiff, sir.’

‘It is too late now, George.’

‘Oh, yes, it is too late now; indeed it is.’

‘Not but that I could put a codicil.’

'Ah, sir, you can put no codicil that can do me a service. No codicil can make her a free woman. There are sorrows, sir, which no codicil can cure.'

'Psha!' said his uncle, trying in his anger to turn himself on his bed, but failing utterly. 'Psha! Then you may live a pauper.'

George remained standing at the bedside; but he knew not what to do, or what answer to make to this ebullition of anger.

'I have nothing further to say,' continued his uncle.

'But we shall part in friendship, shall we not?' said George. 'I have so much to thank you for, that I cannot bear that you should be angry with me now.'

'You are an ass—a fool!'

'You should look on that as my misfortune, sir.' And then he paused a moment. 'I will leave you now, shall I?'

'Yes, and send Mary up.'

'But I may come down again to-morrow?'

'What! haven't they a bed for you in the house?'

Bertram hummed and hawed, and said he did not know. But the conference ended in his promising to stay there. So he went up to town, and returned again bringing down his carpet bag, and preparing to remain till all should be over.

That was a strange household which was now collected together in the house at Hadley. The old man was lying upstairs, daily expecting his death; and he was attended, as it was seemly that he should be, by his nearest relatives. His brother's presence he would not have admitted; but his grandchild was there, and his nephew, and her whom he had always regarded as his niece. Nothing could be more fitting than this. But not the less did Caroline and George feel that it was not fitting that they should be together.

And yet the absolute awkwardness of the meeting was soon over. They soon found themselves able to sit in the same room, conversing on the one subject of interest which the circumstances of the moment gave, without any allusion to past times. They spoke only of the dying man, and asked each other questions only about him. Though they were frequently alone together while Miss Baker was with Mr. Bertram, they never repeated the maddening folly of that last scene in Eaton Square.

'She has got over it now,' said Bertram to himself; and he thought that he rejoiced that it was so. But yet it made his heart sad.

It has passed away like a dream, thought Lady Harcourt; and now he will be happy again. And she, too, strove to comfort herself in thinking so; but the comfort was very cold.

And now George was constantly with his uncle. For the first two days nothing further was said about money. Mr. Bertram seemed to be content that matters should rest as they were then settled, and his nephew certainly had no intention of recurring to the subject on his own behalf. The old man, however, had become much kinder in his manner to him—kinder to him than to any one else in the house ; and exacted from him various little promises of things to be done—of last wishes to be fulfilled.

‘ Perhaps it is better as it is, George,’ he said, as Bertram was sitting by his bedside late one night.

‘ I am sure it is, sir,’ said George, not at all, however, knowing what was the state of things which his uncle described as being better.

‘ All men can’t be made alike,’ continued the uncle.

‘ No, uncle ; there must be rich men, and there must be poor men.’

‘ And you prefer the latter.’

Now George had never said this ; and the assertion coming from his uncle at such a moment, when he could not contradict it, was rather hard on him. He had tried to prove to Mr. Bertram, not so much then, as in their former intercourse, that he would in no way subject his feelings to the money-bags of any man ; that he would make

no sacrifice of his aspirations for the sake of wealth ; that he would not, in fact, sell himself for gold. But he had never said, or intended to say, that money was indifferent to him. Much as his uncle understood, he had failed to understand his nephew's mind. But George could not explain it to him now ;—so he merely smiled, and let the assertion pass.

' Well ; be it so,' said Mr. Bertram. ' But you will see, at any rate, that I have trusted you. Why father and son should be so much unlike, God only can understand.' And from that time he said little or nothing more about his will.

But Sir Omicron had been wrong. Mr. Bertram overlived the week, and overlived the fortnight. We must now leave him and his relatives in the house of sickness, and return to Arthur Wilkinson.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WILKINSON'S TROUBLES.

ARTHUR WILKINSON was received at home with open arms and warm embraces. He was an only son, an only brother, the head and stay of his family ; and of course he was beloved. His mother wept for joy as she saw the renewed plumpness of his cheeks, and declared that Egypt must indeed be a land of fatness ; and his sisters surrounded him, smiling and kissing him, and asking questions, as though he were another Livingstone. This was very delightful ; but a cloud was soon to come across all this sunshine.

Mrs. Wilkinson, always excepting what care she may have had for her son's ill health, had not been unhappy during his absence. She had reigned the female vicaress, without a drawback, praying daily, and in her heart almost hourly, for the continuance in the land of such excellent noblemen as Lord Stapledean. The curate who had taken Arthur's duty had been a very mild

young man, and had been quite contented that Mrs. Wilkinson should leave to him the pulpit and the reading-desk. In all other matters he had been satisfied not to interfere with her power, or to contradict her edicts.

'Mr. Gilliflower has behaved excellently,' she said to her son, soon after his return; 'and has quite understood my position here. I only wish we could keep him in the parish; but that, of course, is impossible.'

'I shouldn't want him at all, mother,' Arthur had replied. 'I am as strong as a horse now.'

'All the same; I should like to have him here,' said Mrs. Wilkinson, in a tone which was the beginning of the battle. How sweet it would have been to her if Arthur could have gone to some good neighbouring parish, leaving her, with Gabriel Gilliflower as her assistant, to manage the souls of Hurst Staple! And why, as she almost asked herself—why should she not be addressed as the Reverend Mrs. Wilkinson?

But the battle had to be fought, and there was to be an end to these sweet dreams. Her son had been meek enough, but he was not as meek as Mr. Gilliflower; and now he was sharpening his arrows, and looking to his bow, and preparing for the war.

'Is Adela at Littlebath?' he asked of one of his sisters, on the third or fourth day after his arrival.

‘Yes,’ said Mary. ‘She is with her aunt. I had a letter from her yesterday.’

‘I wonder whether she would come here if you were to ask her.’

‘Oh, that she would,’ said Mary.

‘I doubt it very much,’ said the more prudent Sophia.

Mrs. Wilkinson heard the conversation, and pondered over it. At the moment she said nothing, pressing down her grief in her deep heart; but that evening, in the book-room, she found Arthur alone; and then she began.

‘You were not in earnest just now about Adela, were you, Arthur?’

‘Indeed I was, mother; quite in earnest.’

‘She has been very much away from Little-bath since her aunt came back from Italy to make a home for her. She was with us; and with the Harcourts, in London; and, since the break-up there, she was at Hadley. It would not be right to Miss Gauntlet to ask her away so soon.’

‘I don’t think Miss Gauntlet would mind her coming here; and even if she does—’

‘And then my time is so much taken up—what with the schools, and what with the parish visiting—’

‘Adela will do the visiting with you.’

‘I really had rather not have her just at pre-

sent ; that is, unless you have some very particular reason.'

' Well, mother, I have a particular reason. But if you had rather that she did not come here, I will go to Littlebath instead.'

There was nothing more said on this occasion ; but that was the beginning of the battle. Mrs. Wilkinson could not but know what her son meant ; and she now knew that all that she dreaded was to come upon her. It was not that she did not wish to see her son happy, or that she did not think that his being married and settled would tend to his happiness ; but she was angry, as other mothers are angry, when their foolish, calf-like boys will go and marry without any incomes on which to support a wife. She said to herself over and over again that night, ' I cannot have a second family here in the parsonage ; that's certain. And where on earth they're to live, I don't know ; and how they're to live when his fellowship is gone, I can't think.' And then she shook her head, clothed as it was in her night-cap, and reposing as it was on her pillow. ' Two thousand pounds is every shilling she has—every shilling.' And then she shook her head again. She knew that the ecclesiastical income was her own ; for had not the good Lord Stapledean given it to her ? But she had sad thoughts, and feared

that even on this point there might be a contest between her and her son.

Two mornings after this the blow came very suddenly. It was now her habit to go into the book-room after breakfast, and set herself down to work—as her husband, the former vicar, had done in his time—and as Arthur, since his return, usually did the same, they naturally found themselves alone together. On the morning in question, she had no sooner seated herself, with her papers before her, than Arthur began. And, alas ! he had to tell her, not what he was going to do, but what he had done.

‘ I spoke to you, mother, of going to Littlebath the other day.’

‘ Yes, Arthur,’ said she, taking her spectacles off, and laying them beside her.

‘ I have written to her, instead.’

‘ And you have made her an offer of marriage ?’

‘ Exactly so. I was sure you must have known how my heart stood towards her. It is many years now since I first thought of this ; but I was deterred, because I feared that my income—our income, that is—was insufficient.’

‘ Oh, Arthur, and so it is. What will you do ? How will you live ? Adela has got just two thousand pounds—about seventy or eighty pounds a year. And your fellowship will be gone. Oh,

Arthur, how will all the mouths be fed when you have six or seven children round you ?'

' I'll tell you what my plans are. If Adela should accept me—'

' Oh, accept you ! She'll accept you fast enough,' said Mrs. Wilkinson, with the venom with which mothers will sometimes speak of the girls to whom their sons are attached.

' It makes me very happy to hear you say so. But I don't know. When I did hint at the matter once before, I got no encouragement.'

' Psha !' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

This sound was music to her son's ears ; so he went on with the more cheerfulness to describe his plans.

' You see, mother, situated as I am, I have no right to expect any increase of income, or to hope that I shall ever be better able to marry than I am now.'

' But you might marry a girl who had something to help. There is Miss Glunter—'

' But it so happens that I am attached to Adela, and not to Miss Glunter.'

' Attached ! But, of course, you must have your own way. You are of age, and I cannot prevent your marrying the cook-maid if you like. What I want to know is, where do you mean to live ?'

' Here, certainly.'

'What! in this house?'

'Certainly. I am bound to live here, as the clergyman of the parish.'

Mrs. Wilkinson drew herself up to her full height, put her spectacles on, and looked at the papers before her; then put them off again, and fixed her eyes on her son. 'Do you think there will be room in the house?' she said. 'I fear you would be preparing great discomfort for Adela. Where on earth would she find room for a nursery? But, Arthur, you have not thought of these things.'

Arthur, however, had thought of them very often. He knew where to find the nursery, and the room for Adela. His difficulty was as to the rooms for his mother and sisters. It was necessary now that this difference of opinion should be explained.

'I suppose that my children, if I have any—'

'Clergymen always have large families,' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

'Well, I suppose they'll have the same nursery that we had.'

'What, and turn Sophy and Mary out of it!' And then she paused, and began to rearrange her papers. 'That will not do at all, Arthur,' she continued. 'It would be unjust in me to allow that; much as I think of your interests, I must of course think of theirs as well.'

How was he to tell her that the house was his own? It was essentially necessary that he should do so, and that he should do so now. If he gave up the point at the present moment, he might give it up for ever. His resolve was, that his mother and sisters should go elsewhere; but in what words could he explain this resolution to her?

'Dear mother, I think we should understand each other—'

'Certainly,' said Mrs. Wilkinson, laying her hands across each other on the table, and preparing for the onslaught.

'It is clearly my duty, as clergyman, to live in this parish, and to live in this house.'

'And it is my duty also, as was excellently explained by Lord Stapledean after your poor father's death.'

'My idea is this—' and then he paused, for his heart misgave him when he attempted to tell his mother that she must pack up and turn out. His courage all but failed him. He felt that he was right, and yet he hardly knew how to explain that he was right without appearing to be unnatural.

'I do not know that Lord Stapledean said anything about the house; but if he did, it could make no difference.'

'Not the least, I should think,' said the lady.

‘When he appointed me to the income of the parish, it could hardly be necessary that he should explain that I was to have the house also.’

‘Mother, when I accepted the living, I promised him that I would give you three hundred and fifty pounds out of the proceeds; and so I will. Adela and I will be very poor, but I shall endeavour to eke out our income; that is, of course, if she consents to marry me—’

‘Psha !’

‘—To eke out our income by taking pupils. To do that, I must have the house at my own disposal.’

‘And you mean to tell me,’ said the female vicaress, rising to her feet in her wrath, ‘that I—that I—am to go away ?’

‘I think it will be better, mother.’

‘And the poor girls ?’

‘For one or two of them there would be room here,’ said Arthur, trying to palliate the matter.

‘One or two of them ! Is that the way you would treat your sisters ? I say nothing about myself, for I have long seen that you are tired of me. I know how jealous you are because Lord Staple-dean has thought proper to—’ she could not exactly remember what phrase would best suit her purpose—‘to—to—to place me here, as he placed your poor father before. I have seen it all, Arthur. But I have my duty to do, and I

shall do it. What I have undertaken in this parish I shall go through with, and if you oppose me I shall apply to his lordship.'

'I think you have misunderstood Lord Stapledean.'

'I have not misunderstood him at all. I know very well what he meant, and I quite appreciate his motives. I have endeavoured to act up to them, and shall continue to do so. I had thought that I had made the house as comfortable to you as any young man could wish.'

'And so you have.'

'And yet you want to turn me out of it—out of my own house!'

'Not to turn you out, mother. If it suits you to remain here for another year—'

'It will suit me to remain here for another ten years, if I am spared so long. Little viper! I suppose this comes from her. After warming her in my bosom when her father died!'

'It can hardly have come from her, seeing that there has never yet been a word spoken between us on the subject. I fear that you greatly mistake the footing on which we stand together. I have no reasonable ground for hoping for a favourable answer.'

'Psha! viper!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilkinson, in dire wrath. Mothers are so angry when other girls, not their own, will get offers; so doubly angry when their own sons make them.

' You will make me very unhappy if you speak ill of her,' said Arthur.

' Has it ever come into your head to think where your mother and sisters are to live when you turn them out ? ' said she.

' Littlebath,' suggested Arthur.

' Littlebath ! ' said Mrs. Wilkinson, with all the scorn that she could muster to the service. ' Littlebath ! I am to put up with the aunt, I suppose, when you take the niece. But I shall not go to Littlebath at your bidding, sir.' And so saying, she gathered up her spectacles, and stalked out of the room.

Arthur was by no means satisfied with the interview, and yet had he been wise he might have been. The subject had been broached, and that in itself was a great deal. And the victory had by no means been with Mrs. Wilkinson. She had threatened, indeed, to appeal to Lord Staple-dean ; but that very threat showed how conscious she was that she had no power of her own to hold her place where she was. He ought to have been satisfied ; but he was not so.

And now he had to wait for his answer from Adela. Gentlemen who make offers by letter must have a weary time of it, waiting for the return of post, or for the return of two posts, as was the case in this instance. And Arthur had a weary time of it. Two evenings he had to pass,

after the conversation above recounted, before he got his letter ; and dreadful evenings they were. His mother was majestic, glum, and cross ; his sisters were silent and dignified. It was clear to him that they had all been told ; and so told as to be leagued in enmity against him. What account their mother may have given to them of their future poverty, he knew not ; but he felt certain that she had explained to them how cruelly he meant to turn them out on the wide world ; unnatural ogre that he was.

Mary was his favourite, and to her he did say a few words. ‘ Mamma has told you what I have done, hasn’t she ?’

‘ Yes, Arthur,’ said Mary, demurely.

‘ And what do you think about it ?’

‘ Think about it !’

‘ Yes. Do you think she’ll accept me ?’

‘ Oh ! she’ll accept you. I don’t doubt about that.’ How cheap girls do make themselves when talking of each other !

‘ And will it not be an excellent thing for me ?’ said he.

‘ But about the house, Arthur !’ And Mary looked very glum. So he said nothing further to any of them.

On the day after this he got his answer ; and now we will give the two letters. Arthur’s was not written without much trouble and various

copies ; but Adela's had come straight from her heart at once.

'Hurst Staple, April, 184—.

'My dear Adela,

'You will be surprised to receive a letter from me, and more so, I am sure, when you read its contents. You have heard, I know, from Mary, of my return home. Thank God, I am quite strong again. I enjoyed my trip very much. I had feared that it would be very dull before I knew that George Bertram would go with me.

'I wonder whether you recollect the day when I drove you to Ripley Station ! It is eighteen months ago now, I believe ; and indeed the time seems much longer. I had thought then to have said to you what I have to say now ; but I did not. Years ago I thought to do the same, and then also I did not. You will know what I mean. I did not like to ask you to share such poverty, such a troubled house as mine will be.

'But I have loved you, Adela, for years and years. Do you remember how you used to comfort me at that grievous time, when I disappointed them all so much about my degree ? I remember it so well. It used to lie on my tongue then to tell you that I loved you ; but that would have been folly. Then came my poor father's death, and the living which I had to take under such circumstances. I made up my mind then that it

was my duty to live single. I think I told you, though I am sure you forget that.

'I am not richer now, but I am older. I seem to care less about poverty on my own behalf; and—though I don't know whether you will forgive me for this—I feel less compunction in asking you to be poor with me. Do not imagine from this that I feel confident as to your answer. I am very far from that. But I know that you used to love me as a friend—and I now venture to ask you to love me as my wife.

'Dearest Adela! I feel that I may call you so now, even if I am never to call you so again. If you will share the world with me, I will give you whatever love can give—though I can give but little more. I need not tell you how we should be circumstanced. My mother must have three hundred and fifty pounds out of the living as long as she lives ; and should I survive her, I must, of course, maintain the girls. But I mean to explain to my mother that she had better live elsewhere. There will be trouble about this ; but I am sure that it is right. I shall tell her of this letter tomorrow. I think she knows what my intention is, though I have not exactly told it to her.

'I need not say how anxious I shall be till I hear from you. I shall not expect a letter till Thursday morning ; but, if possible, do let me have it then. Should it be favourable—though I

do not allow myself to have any confidence—but should it be favourable, I shall be at Littlebath on Monday evening. Believe me, that I love you dearly.

‘Yours, dear Adela,

‘ARTHUR WILKINSON.’

Aunt Penelope was a lady addicted to very early habits, and consequently she and Adela had usually left the breakfast-table before the postman had visited them. From this it resulted that Adela received her letter by herself. The first words told her what it contained, and her eyes immediately became suffused with tears. After all, then, her patience was to be rewarded. But it had not been patience so much as love ; love that admitted of no change ; love on which absence had had no effect ; love which had existed without any hope ; which had been acknowledged by herself, and acknowledged as a sad misfortune. But now —. She took the letter up, but she could not read it. She turned it over, and at the end, through her tears, she saw those words—‘Believe me, that I love you dearly.’ They were not like the burning words, the sweet violent protestations of a passionate lover. But coming from him, they were enough. At last she was to be rewarded.

And then at length she read it. Ah ! yes ; she

recollected the day well when he had driven her to Ripley Station, and asked her those questions as he was persuading Dumpling to mount the hill. The very words were still in her ears. ‘Would *you* come to such a house, Adela?’ Ay, indeed, would she—if only she were duly asked. But he—! Had it not seemed then as if he almost wished that the proffer should come from her? Not to that would she stoop. But as for sharing such a house as his—any house with him! What did true love mean, if she were not ready to do that?

And she remembered, too, that comforting of which he spoke. That had been the beginning of it all, when he took those walks along the river to West Putford; when she had learned to look for his figure coming through the little wicket at the bottom of their lawn. Then she had taxed her young heart with imprudence—but in doing so she had found that it was too late. She had soon told the truth—to herself that is; and throughout she had been true. Now she had her reward; there in her hands, pressing it to her heart. He had loved her for years and years, he said. Yes, and so had she loved him; and now he should know it. But not quite at once—in some sweet hour of fullest confidence she would whisper it all to him.

‘I think I told you; though, I am sure, you have forgotten that.’

Forget it! no, not a word, not one of his tones, not a glance of his eyes, as he sat there in her father's drawing-room that morning, all but unable to express his sorrows. She could never forget the effort with which she had prevented the tell-tale blood from burning in her cheeks, or the difficulty with which she had endured his confidence. But she had endured it, and now had come her reward. Then he had come to tell her that he was too poor to marry. Much as she loved him, she had then almost despised him. But the world had told him to be wiser. The world, which makes so many niggards, had taught him to be freer of heart. Now he was worthy of her, now that he cared nothing for poverty. Yes, now she had her reward.

He had allowed her till the second post for her reply. That was so kind of him, as it was necessary that she should tell her aunt. As to the nature of her reply—as to that she never doubted for a moment. She would consult her aunt; but she would do so with her mind fully made up as to the future. No aunt, no Mrs. Wilkinson, should rob her of her happiness now that he had spoken. No one should rob him of the comfort of her love!

In the evening, after thinking of it for hours, she told her aunt; or, rather, handed to her Arthur's letter, that she might read it. Miss



Penelope's face grew very long as she did read it ; and she made this remark—‘Three hundred and fifty pounds ! why, my dear, there will be only one hundred and fifty left.’

‘We can't keep our carriage, certainly, aunt.’

‘Then you mean to accept him ?’

‘Yes, aunt.’

‘Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! What will you do when the children come ?’

‘We must make the best of it, aunt.’

‘Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! And you will have his mother with you always.’

‘If so, then we should not be so very poor ; but I do not think that that is what Arthur means.’

There was not much more said about it between them ; and at last, in the seclusion of her own bedroom, Adela wrote her letter.

‘Littlebath, Tuesday night.

‘Dear Arthur,

‘I received your letter this morning ; but as you were so kind as to give me a day to answer it, I have put off doing so till I could be quite alone. It will be a very simple answer. I value your love more than anything in the world. You have my whole heart. I hope, for your sake, that the troubles which you speak of will not be many ; but whatever they may be, I will share them. If I can, I will lessen them.

' I hope it is not unmaidenly to say that I have received your dear letter with true delight ; I do not know why it should be. We have known each other so long, that it is almost natural that I should love you. I do love you dearly, dearest Arthur ; and with a heart thankful for God's goodness to me, I will put my hand in yours with perfect trust—fearing nothing, then, as far as this world is concerned.

' I do not regard the poverty of which you speak, at least not for my own sake. What I have of my own is, I know, very little. I wish now that I could make it more for you. But, no ; I will wish for nothing more, seeing that so much has been given to me. Everything has been given to me when I have your love.

' I hope that this will not interfere with your mother's comfort. If anything now could make me unhappy, it would be that she should not be pleased at our prospects. Give her my kindest, kindest love ; and tell her that I hope she will let me look on her as a mother.

' I will write to Mary very soon ; but bid her write to me first. I cannot tell her how happy, how very happy I really am, till she has first wished me joy.

' I have, of course, told aunt Penelope. She, too, says something about poverty. I tell her it is croaking. The honest do not beg their bread ;

do they, Arthur ? But in spite of her croaking, she will be very happy to see you on Monday, if it shall suit you to come. If so, let me have one other little line. But I am so contented now, that I shall hardly be more so even to have you here.

‘ God bless you, my own, own, own dearest.

‘ Ever yours with truest affection,

‘ ADELA.’

And I also hope that Adela's letter will not be considered unmaidenly ; but I have my fears. There will be those who will say that it is sadly deficient in reserve. Ah ! had she not been reserved enough for the last four or five years ? Reserve is beautiful in a maiden if it be rightly timed. Sometimes one would fain have more of it. But when the heart is full, and when it may speak out ; when time, and circumstances, and the world permit—then we should say that honesty is better than reserve. Adela's letter was honest on the spur of the moment. Her reserve had been the work of years.

Arthur, at any rate, was satisfied. Her letter seemed to him to be the very perfection of words. Armed with that he would face his mother, though she appeared armed from head to foot in the Stapledean panoply. While he was reading his letter he was at breakfast with them all ; and

when he had finished it for the second time, he handed it across the table to his mother.

'Oh! I suppose so,' was her only answer, as she gave it him back.

The curiosity of the girls was too great now for the composure of their silent dignity. 'It is from Adela,' said Mary; 'what does she say?'

'You may read it,' said Arthur, again handing the letter across the table.

'Well, I do wish you joy,' said Mary, 'though there will be so very little money.'

Seeing that Arthur, since his father's death, had, in fact, supported his mother and sisters out of his own income, this reception of his news was rather hard upon him. And so he felt it.

'You will not have to share the hardships,' he said, as he left the room; 'and so you need not complain.'

There was nothing more said about it that morning; but in the evening, when they were alone, he spoke to his sister again. 'You will write to her, Mary, I hope?'

'Yes, I will write to her,' said Mary, half ashamed of herself.

'Perhaps it is not surprising that my mother should be vexed, seeing the false position in which both she and I have been placed; partly by my fault, for I should not have accepted the living under such conditions.'

'Oh, Arthur, you would not have refused it?'

'I ought to have done so. But, Mary, you and the girls should be ready to receive Adela with open arms. What other sister could I have given you that you would have loved better?'

'Oh, no one; not for her own sake—no one half so well.'

'Then tell her so, and do not cloud her prospects by writing about the house. You have all had shelter and comfort hitherto, and be trustful that it will be continued to you.'

This did very well with his sister; but the affair with his mother was much more serious. He began by telling her that he should go to Littlebath on Monday, and be back on Wednesday.

'Then I shall go to Bowes on Wednesday,' said Mrs. Wilkinson. Now we all know that Bowes is a long way from Staplehurst. The journey has already been made once in these pages. But Mrs. Wilkinson was as good as her word.

'To Bowes!' said Arthur.

'Yes, to Bowes, sir; to Lord Stapledean. That is, if you hold to your scheme of turning me out of my own house.'

'I think it would be better, mother, that we should have two establishments.'

'And, therefore, I am to make way for you and that —' viper, she was going to say again; but

looking into her son's face, she became somewhat more merciful—‘for you,’ she said, ‘and that chit!’

‘As clergyman of the parish, I think that I ought to live in the parsonage. You, mother, will have so much the larger portion of the income.’

‘Very well. There need be no more words about it. I shall start for Bowes on next Wednesday.’ And so she did.

Arthur wrote his ‘one other little line.’ As it was three times as long as his first letter, it shall not be printed. And he did make his visit to Littlebath. How happy Adela was as she leant trustingly on his arm, and felt that it was her own! He stayed, however, but one night, and was back at Staplehurst before his mother started for Bowes.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER JOURNEY TO BOWES.

MRS. WILKINSON did not leave her home for her long and tedious journey without considerable parade. Her best new black silk dress was packed up in order that due honour might be done to Lord Stapledean's hospitality, and so large a box was needed that Dumpling and the four-wheeled carriage were hardly able to take her to the railway-station. Then there arose the question who should drive her. Arthur offered to do so; but she was going on a journey of decided hostility as regarded him, and under such circumstances she could not bring herself to use his services even over a portion of the road. So the stable-boy was her charioteer.

She talked about Lord Stapledean the whole evening before she went. Arthur would have explained to her something of that nobleman's character if she would have permitted it. But she would not. When he hinted that she would find

Lord Stapledean austere in his manner, she answered that his lordship no doubt had had his reasons for being austere with so very young a man as Arthur had been. When he told her about the Bowes hotel, she merely shook her head significantly. A nobleman who had been so generous to her and hers as Lord Stapledean would hardly allow her to remain at the inn.

'I am very sorry that the journey is forced upon me,' she said to Arthur, as she sat with her bonnet on, waiting for the vehicle.

'I am sorry that you are going, mother, certainly,' he had answered; 'because I know that it will lead to disappointment.'

'But I have no other course left open to me,' she continued. 'I cannot see my poor girls turned out houseless on the world.' And then, refusing even to lean on her son's arm, she stepped up heavily into the carriage, and seated herself beside the boy.

'When shall we expect you, mamma?' said Sophia.

'It will be impossible for me to say; but I shall be sure to write as soon as I have seen his lordship. Good-bye to you, girls.' And then she was driven away.

'It is a very foolish journey,' said Arthur.

'Mamma feels that she is driven to it,' said Sophia.

Mrs. Wilkinson had written to Lord Staple-dean two days before she started, informing his lordship that it had become very necessary that she should wait upon him on business connected with the living, and therefore she was aware that her coming would not be wholly unexpected. In due process of time she arrived at Bowes, very tired and not a little disgusted at the great expense of her journey. She had travelled but little alone, and knew nothing as to the cost of hotels, and not a great deal as to that of railways, coaches, and post-chaises. But at last she found herself in the same little inn which had previously received Arthur when he made the same journey.

'The lady can have a post-chaise, of course,' said the landlady, speaking from the bar. 'Oh, yes, Lord Stapledean is at home, safe enough. He's never very far away from it to the best of my belief.'

'It's only a mile or so, is it?' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

'Seven long miles, ma'am,' said the landlady.

'Seven miles! dear, dear. I declare I never was so tired in my life. You can put the box somewhere behind in the post-chaise, can't you?'

'Yes, ma'am; we can do that. Be you a-going to stay at his lordship's, then?'

To this question Mrs. Wilkinson made an ambiguous answer. Her confidence was waning, now that she drew near to the centre of her aspirations. But at last she did exactly as her son had done before her. She said she would take her box; but that it was possible she might want a bed that evening. 'Very possible,' the landlady said to herself.

'And you'll take a bite of something before you start, ma'am,' she said, out loud. But, no; it was only now twelve o'clock, and she would be at Bowes Lodge a very little after one. She had still sufficient confidence in Lord Stapledean to feel sure of her lunch. When people reached Hurst Staple Vicarage about that hour, there was always something for them to eat. And so she started.

It was April now; but even in April that bleak northern fell was very cold. Nothing more inhospitable than that road could be seen. It was unsheltered, swept by every blast, very steep, and mercilessly oppressed by turnpikes. Twice in those seven miles one-and-sixpence was inexorably demanded from her.

'But I know one gate always clears the other, when they are so near,' she argued.

'Noa, they doant,' was all the answer she received from the turnpike woman, who held a baby under each arm.

'I am sure the woman is robbing me,' said poor Mrs. Wilkinson.

'No, she beant,' said the post-boy. They are good hearty people in that part of the world; but they do not brook suspicion, and the courtesies of life are somewhat neglected. And then she arrived at Lord Stapledean's gate.

'Be you she what sent the letter?' said the woman at the lodge, holding it only half open.

'Yes, my good woman; yes,' said Mrs. Wilkinson, thinking that her troubles were now nearly over. 'I am the lady; I am Mrs. Wilkinson.'

'Then my lord says as how you're to send up word what you've got to say.' And the woman still stood in the gateway.

'Send up word!' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

'Yees. Just send up word. Here's Jock can rin up.'

'But Jock can't tell his lordship what I have to say to him. I have to see his lordship on most important business,' said she, in her dismay.

'I'm telling you no more than what my lord said his ain sell. He just crawled down here his ain sell. "If a woman comes," said he, "don't let her through the gate till she sends up word what

she's got to say to me.'" And the portress looked as though she were resolved to obey her master's orders.

'Good heavens! There must be some mistake in this, I'm sure. I am the clergyman of Staplehurst—I mean his widow. Staplehurst, you know; his lordship's property.'

'I didna know nothing aboot it.'

'Oh, drive on, post-boy. There must be some mistake. The woman must be making some dreadful mistake.'

At last the courage of the lodge-keeper gave way before the importance of the post-chaise, and she did permit Mrs. Wilkinson to proceed.

'Mither,' said the woman's eldest hope, 'you'll catch it noo.'

'Eh, lad; weel. He'll no hang me.' And so the woman consoled herself.

The house called Bowes Lodge looked damper and greener, more dull, silent, and melancholy, even than it had done when Arthur made his visit. The gravel sweep before the door was covered by weeds, and the shrubs looked as though they had known no gardener's care for years. The door itself did not even appear to be for purposes of ingress and egress, and the post-boy had to search among the boughs and foliage with which the place was overgrown before he could find the bell. When found, it sounded

with a hoarse, rusty, jangling noise, as though angry at being disturbed in so unusual a manner.

But, rusty and angry as it was, it did evoke a servant—though not without considerable delay. A cross old man did come at last, and the door was slowly opened. ‘Yes,’ said the man. ‘The marquis was at home, no doubt. He was in the study. But that was no rule why he should see folk.’ And then he looked very suspiciously at the big trunk, and muttered something to the post-boy, which Mrs. Wilkinson could not hear.

‘Will you oblige me by giving my card to his lordship—Mrs. Wilkinson? I want to see him on very particular business. I wrote to his lordship to say that I should be here.’

‘Wrote to his lordship, did you? Then it’s my opinion he won’t see you at all.’

‘Yes, he will. If you’ll take him my card, I know he’ll see me. Will you oblige me, sir, by taking it into his lordship?’ And she put on her most imperious look.

The man went, and Mrs. Wilkinson sat silent in the post-chaise for a quarter of an hour. Then the servant returned, informing her that she was to send in her message. His lordship had given directions at the lodge that she was not to come up, and could not understand how it had come to pass that the lady had forced her way to

the hall-door. At any rate, he would not see her till he knew what it was about.

Now it was impossible for Mrs. Wilkinson to explain the exact nature of her very intricate case to Lord Stapledean's butler, and yet she could not bring herself to give up the battle without making some further effort. 'It is about the vicarage at Hurst Staple,' said she; 'the vicarage at Hurst Staple,' she repeated, impressing the words on the man's memory. 'Don't forget, now.' The man gave a look of ineffable scorn, and then walked away, leaving Mrs. Wilkinson still in the post-chaise.

And now came on an April shower, such as April showers are on the borders of Westmoreland. It rained and blew; and after a while the rain turned to sleet. The post-boy buttoned up his coat, and got under the shelter of the portico; the horses drooped their heads, and shivered. Mrs. Wilkinson wished herself back at Hurst Staple—or even comfortably settled at Littlebath, as her son had once suggested.

'His lordship don't know nothing about the vicarage,' bellowed out the butler, opening the hall-door only half way, so that his face just appeared above the lock.

'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' said Mrs. Wilkinson. 'Just let me down into the hall, and then I will explain it to you.'



'Them 'orses 'll be foundered as sure as heggs,' said the post-boy.

Mrs. Wilkinson at last succeeded in making her way into the hall, and the horses were allowed to go round to the yard. And then at last, after half a dozen more messages to and fro, she was informed that Lord Stapledean would see her. So dreadful had been the contest hitherto, that this amount of success was very grateful. Her feeling latterly had been one of intense hostility to the butler rather than to her son. Now that she had conquered that most savage Cerberus, all would be pleasant with her. But, alas! she soon found that in passing Cerberus she had made good her footing in a region as little desirable as might be.

She was ushered into the same book-room in which Arthur had been received, and soon found herself seated in the same chair, and on the same spot. Lord Stapledean was thinner now, even than he had been then; he had a stoop in his shoulders, and his face and hair were more gray. His eyes seemed to his visitor to be as sharp and almost as red as those of ferrets. As she entered, he just rose from his seat and pointed to the chair on which she was to sit.

'Well, ma'am,' said he; 'what's all this about the clergyman's house at Hurst Staple? I don't understand it at all.'

'No, my lord; I'm sure your lordship can't understand. That's why I have thought it my duty to come all this way to explain it.'

'All what way?'

'All the way from Hurst Staple, in Hampshire, my lord. When your lordship was so considerate as to settle what my position in the parish was to be—'

'Settle your position in the parish!'

'Yes, my lord—as to my having the income and the house.'

'What does the woman mean?' said he, looking down towards the rug beneath his feet, but speaking quite out loud. 'Settle her position in the parish! Why, ma'am, I don't know who you are, and what your position is, or anything about you.'

'I am the widow of the late vicar, Lord Stapledean; and when he died—'

'I was fool enough to give the living to his son. I remember all about it. He was an imprudent man, and lived beyond his means, and there was nothing left for any of you—wasn't that it?'

'Yes, my lord,' said Mrs. Wilkinson, who was so troubled in spirit that she hardly knew what to say. 'That is, we never lived beyond our means at all, my lord. There were seven children; and they were all educated most respect-

ably. The only boy was sent to college ; and I don't think there was any imprudence—indeed I don't, my lord. And there was something saved ; and the insurance was always regularly paid ; and—'

The marquis absolutely glared at her, as she went on with her domestic defence. The household at Hurst Staple had been creditably managed, considering the income ; and it was natural that she should wish to set her patron right. But every word that she said carried her further away from her present object.

' And what on earth have you come to me for ?' said Lord Stapledean.

' I'll tell your lordship, if you'll only allow me five minutes. Your lordship remembers when poor Mr. Wilkinson died ?'

' I don't remember anything about it.'

' Your lordship was good enough to send for Arthur.'

' Arthur !'

' Yes, my lord.'

' Who's Arthur ?'

' My boy, my lord. Don't you remember ? He was just in orders then, and so you were good enough to put him into the living—that is to say, not exactly into the living ; but to make him curate, as it were ; and you allocated the income to me ; and—'

‘Allocated the income?’ said Lord Stapledean, putting up his hands in token of unlimited surprise.

‘Yes, my lord. Your lordship saw just how it was; and, as I could not exactly hold the living myself—’

‘Hold the living yourself! Why, are you not a woman, ma’am?’

‘Yes, my lord, of course; that was the reason. So you put Arthur into the living, and you allocated the income to me. That is all settled. But now the question is about the house.’

‘The woman’s mad,’ said Lord Stapledean, looking again to the carpet, but speaking quite out loud. ‘Stark mad. I think you’d better go home, ma’am; a great deal better.’

‘My lord, if you’d only give yourself the trouble to understand me—’

‘I don’t understand a word you say. I have nothing to do with the income, or the house, or with you, or with your son.’

‘Oh, yes, my lord, indeed you have.’

‘I tell you I haven’t, ma’am; and what’s more, I won’t.’

‘He’s going to marry, my lord,’ continued Mrs. Wilkinson, beginning to whimper; ‘and we are to be turned out of the house, unless you will interfere to prevent it. And he wants me to go and live at Littlebath. And I’m sure your lord-

ship meant me to have the house when you allocated the income.'

'And you've come all the way to Bowes, have you, because your son wants to enjoy his own income?'

'No, my lord; he doesn't interfere about that. He knows he can't touch that, because your lordship allocated it to me—and, to do him justice, I don't think he would if he could. And he's not a bad boy, my lord; only mistaken about this.'

'Oh, he wants his own house, does he?'

'But it isn't his own house, you know. It has been my house ever since his father died. And if your lordship will remember—'

'I tell you what, Mrs. Wilkinson; it seems to me that your son should not let you come out so far by yourself—'

'My lord!'

'And if you'll take my advice, you'll go home as fast as you can, and live wherever he bids you.'

'But, my lord—'

'At any rate, I must beg you not to trouble me any more about the matter. When I was a young man your husband read with me for a few months; and I really think that two presentations to the living have been a sufficient payment for that. I know nothing about your son, and I

don't want to know anything. I dare say he's as good as most other clergymen—'

'Oh, yes; he is, my lord.'

'But I don't care a straw who lives in the house.'

'Don't you, my lord?' said Mrs. Wilkinson, very despondently.

'Not one straw. I never heard such a proposition from a woman in my life—never. And now, if you'll allow me, I'll wish you good-morning, ma'am. Good-morning to you.' And the marquis made a slight feint, as though to raise himself from his chair.

Mrs. Wilkinson got up, and stood upright before him, with her handkerchief to her eyes. It was very grievous to her to have failed so utterly. She still felt sure that if Lord Stapledean would only be made to understand the facts of the case, he would even yet take her part. She had come so far to fight her battle, that she could not bring herself to leave the ground as long as a chance of victory remained to her. How could she put the matter in the fewest words, so as to make the marquis understand the very—very truth?

'If your lordship would only allow me to recall to your memory the circumstances of the case,—how you, yourself, allocated—'

Lord Stapledean turned suddenly at the bell-rope, and gave it a tremendous pull—then another

—and then a third, harder than the others. Down came the rope about his ears, and the peal was heard ringing through the house.

‘Thompson,’ he said to the man, as he entered, ‘show that lady the door.’

‘Yes, my lord.’

‘Show her the door immediately.’

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Thompson, standing irresolute. ‘Now, ma’am; the post-chaise is waiting.’

Mrs. Wilkinson had still strength enough to prevent collapse, and to gather herself together with some little feminine dignity. ‘I think I have been very badly treated,’ she said, as she prepared to move.

‘Thompson,’ shrieked the marquis, in his passion; ‘show that lady the door.’

‘Yes, my lord;’ and Thompson gracefully waved his hand, pointing down the passage. It was the only way in which he could show Mrs. Wilkinson the way out.

And then, obedient to necessity, she walked forth. Never had she held her head so high, or tossed her bonnet with so proud a shake, as she did in getting into that post-chaise. Thompson held the handle of the carriage-door: he also offered her his arm, but she despised any such aid. She climbed in unassisted; the post-boy mounted his jade; and so she was driven forth,

not without titters from the woman at the lodge-gate. With heavy heart she reached the inn, and sat herself down to weep alone in her bedroom.

'So, you've come back?' said the landlady.

'Ugh!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilkinson.

We will not dwell long on her painful journey back to Hurst Staple; nor on the wretched reflections with which her mind was laden. She sent on a line by post to her eldest daughter, so that she was expected; and Dumpling and the phaëton and the stable-boy were there to meet her. She had feared that Arthur would come: but Arthur had dreaded the meeting also; and, having talked the matter over with his sisters, had remained at home. He was in the book-room, and hearing the wheels, as the carriage drew up to the door, he went out to greet his mother on the steps.

At the first moment of meeting there was nothing said, but she warmly pressed the hand which he held out to her.

'What sort of a journey have you had?' said Sophia.

'Oh, it is a dreadful place!' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

'It is not a nice country,' said Arthur.

By this time they were in the drawing-room, and the mother was seated on a sofa, with one of her girls on each side of her.

'Sophy,' she said, 'get up for a moment; I want Arthur to come here.' So Sophy did get up, and her son immediately taking her place, put his arm round his mother's waist.

'Arthur,' she whispered to him, 'I fear I have been foolish about this.'

That was all that was ever said to him about the journey to Bowes. He was not the man to triumph over his mother's failure. He merely kissed her when her little confession was made, and pressed her slightly with his arm. From that time it was understood that Adela was to be brought thither, as soon as might be, to reign the mistress of the vicarage ; and that then, what further arrangements might be necessary, were to be made by them all at their perfect leisure. That question of the nursery might, at any rate, remain in abeyance for twelve months.

Soon after that, it was decided in full conclave, that if Adela would consent, the marriage should take place in the summer. Very frequent letters passed between Hurst Staple and Littlebath, and Mrs. Wilkinson no longer alluded to them with severity, or even with dislike. Lord Stapledean had, at any rate, thoroughly convinced her that the vicarage-house belonged to the vicar—to the vicar male, and not to the vicar female ; and now that her eyes had been opened on this point, she

found herself obliged to confess that Adela Gauntlet would not make a bad wife.

‘Of course we shall be poor, mother ; but we expect that.’

‘I hope you will, at least, be happy,’ said Mrs. Wilkinson, not liking at present to dwell on the subject of their poverty, as her conscience began to admonish her with reference to the three hundred and fifty pounds per annum.

‘I should think I might be able to get pupils,’ continued Arthur. ‘If I had two at one hundred and fifty pounds each, we might be comfortable enough.’

‘Perhaps Adela would not like to have lads in the house.’

‘Ah, mother, you don’t know Adela. She will not object to anything because she does not herself like it.’ And in this manner that affair was so far settled.

And then Adela was invited to Hurst Staple, and she accepted the invitation. She was not coy in declaring the pleasure with which she did so, nor was she bashful or shamefaced in the matter. She loved the man that she was to marry—had long loved him ; and now it was permitted to her to declare her love. Now it was her duty to declare it, and to assure him, with all the pretty protestations in her power, that her

best efforts should be given to sweeten his cup, and smooth his path. Her duty now was to seek his happiness, to share his troubles, to be one with him. In her mind it was not less her duty now than it would be when, by God's ordinance, they should be one bone and one flesh.

While their mother had held her seat on her high horse, with reference to that question of the house, Sophia and Mary had almost professed hostility to Adela. They had given in no cordial adherence to their brother's marriage; but now they were able to talk of their coming sister with interest and affection. ‘I know that Adela would like this, Arthur;’ and ‘I’m sure that Adela would prefer that;’ and ‘when we’re gone, you know, Adela will do so and so.’ Arthur received all this with brotherly love and the kindest smiles, and thanked God in his heart that his mother had taken that blessed journey to Bowes Lodge.

‘Adela,’ he once said to her, as they were walking together, one lonely spring evening, along the reedy bank of that river, ‘Adela, had I had your courage, all this would have been settled long since.’

‘I don’t know,’ she said; ‘but I am sure of this, that it is much better as it is. Now we may fairly trust that we do know our own minds. Love should be tried, perhaps, before it is trusted.’

‘ I should have trusted yours at the first word you could have spoken, the first look you would have given me.’

‘ And I should have done so too ; and then we might have been wrong. Is it not well as it is, Arthur ?’

And then he declared that it was very well ; very well, indeed. Ah, yes ! how could it have been better with him ? He thought now of his past sorrows, his deep woes, his great disappointments ; of that bitter day at Oxford when the lists came down ; of the half-broken heart with which he had returned from Bowes ; of the wretchedness of that visit to West Putford. He thought of the sad hours he had passed, seated idle and melancholy in the vicarage book-room, meditating on his forlorn condition. He had so often wailed over his own lot, droning out a dirge, a melancholy *væ victis* for himself ! And now, for the first time, he could change the note. Now, his song was *Io triumphe*, as he walked along. He shouted out a joyful pæan with the voice of his heart. Had he taken the most double of all firsts, what more could fate have given to him ? or, at any rate, what better could fate have done for him ?

And to speak sooth, fate had certainly given to him quite as much as he had deserved.

And then it was settled that they should be

married early in the ensuing June. ‘On the first,’ said Arthur. ‘No; the thirtieth,’ said Adela, laughing. And then, as women always give more than they claim, it was settled that they should be married on the eleventh. Let us trust that the day may always be regarded as propitious.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BERTRAM'S DEATH.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT had certainly played his hand badly, considering the number of trumps that he had held, and that he had turned up an honour in becoming solicitor-general. He was not now in a happy condition. He was living alone in his fine house in Eaton Square ; he was out of office ; he was looked on with an evil eye by his former friends, in that he had endeavoured to stick to office too long ; he was deeply in debt, and his once golden hopes with reference to Mr. Bertram were becoming fainter and fainter every day. Nor was this all. Not only did he himself fear that he should get but little of the Hadley money, but his creditors had begun to have the same fears. They had heard that he was not to be the heir, and were importunate accordingly. It might be easy to stave them off till Mr. Bertram should be under the ground ; but then—what then ? His professional income might still be large, though

not increasing as it should have done. And what lawyer can work well if his mind be encumbered by deep troubles of his own ?

He had told George Bertram that he would go down to Hadley and claim his wife if he did not receive a favourable message from his wife's grandfather ; and he now determined to take some such step. He felt himself driven to do something ; to bring about some arrangement ; to make some use of the few remaining grains of sand which were still to run through the glass that was measuring out the lees of life for that old man.

So thinking, but not quite resolved as to what he would do when he reached the house, he started for Hadley. He knew that George was still there, that his wife was there, and that Mr. Bertram was there ; and he trusted that he should not fail at any rate in seeing them. He was not by nature a timid man, and had certainly not become so by education ; but, nevertheless, his heart did not beat quite equably within his bosom when he knocked at the rich man's door.

Of course he was well known to the servant. At first he asked after Mr. Bertram, and was told that he was much the same—going very fast ; the maid did not think that Sir Henry could see him. The poor girl, knowing that the gentleman before her was not a welcome visitor, stood in the doorway, as though to guard the ladies who were in the drawing-room.

‘Who is here now?’ said Sir Henry. ‘Who is staying here?’

‘Mr. George,’ said the girl, thinking that she would be safest in mentioning his name, ‘and Miss Baker, sir.’

‘Lady Harcourt is here, I suppose?’

‘Yes, sir; her ladyship is in the drawing-room,’ and she shook in her shoes before him as she made the announcement.

For a moment Sir Henry was inclined to force his way by the trembling young woman, and appear before the ladies. But then, what would he get by it? Angry as he was with all the Hadley people, he was still able to ask himself that question. Supposing that he were there, standing before his wife; supposing even that he were able to bring her to his feet by a glance, how much richer would that make him? What bills would that pay? He had loved his wife once with a sort of love; but that day was gone. When she had been at such pains to express her contempt for him, all tenderness had deserted him. It might be wise to make use of her—not to molest her, as long as her grandfather lived. When the old miser should have gone, it would be time for him to have his revenge. In the meantime, he could gain nothing by provoking her. So he told the servant that he wished to see Mr. George Bertram.

As it happened, George and Lady Harcourt

were together, and Miss Baker was keeping watch with the sick man upstairs. The drawing-room was close to the hall, and Caroline's eager ear caught the tones of her husband's voice.

'It is Sir Henry,' she said, becoming suddenly pale, and rising to her feet, as though prepared to retreat to some protection. Bertram's duller ear could not hear him, but he also rose from his chair. 'Are you sure it is he?'

'I heard his voice plainly,' said Caroline, in a tremulous whisper. 'Do not leave me, George. Whatever happens, do not leave me.' They called each other now by their Christian names, as cousins should do; and their intercourse with each other had never been other than cousinly since that parting in Eaton Square.

And then the door was opened, and the maid-servant, in the glummiest of voices, announced that Sir Henry wanted to see Mr. George.

'Show him into the dining-room,' said George; and then following the girl after a minute's interval, he found himself once more in the presence of his old friend.

Sir Henry was even darker looking, and his brow still more forbidding than at that last interview at George's chambers. He was worn and care-marked, and appeared to be ten years older than was really the case. He did not wait till George should address him, but began at once:—

‘Bertram,’ said he, with a voice intended to be stern, ‘there are two persons here I want to see, your uncle and my wife.’

‘I make no objection to your seeing either, if they are willing to see you.’

‘Yes; but that won’t do for me. My duty compels me to look after them both, and I mean to do so before I leave Hadley.’

‘I will send your name to them at once,’ said George; ‘but it must depend on them whether they will see you.’ And so saying, he rang the bell, and sent a message up to his uncle.

Nothing was said till the girl returned. Sir Henry paced the room backward and forward, and George stood leaning with his back against the chimney-piece. ‘Mr. Bertram says that he’ll see Sir Henry, if he’ll step up stairs,’ said the girl.

‘Very well. Am I to go up now?’

‘If you please, sir.’

Bertram followed Sir Henry to the door, to show him the room; but the latter turned round on the stairs, and said that he would prefer to have no one present at the interview.

‘I will only open the door for you,’ said the other. This he did, and was preparing to return, when his uncle called him. ‘Do not go away, George,’ said he. ‘Sir Henry will want you to show him down again.’ And so they stood together at the bedside.

'Well, Sir Henry, this is kind of you,' said he, putting his thin, bony hand out upon the coverlid, by way of making an attempt at an Englishman's usual greeting.

Sir Henry took it gently in his, and found it cold and clammy. 'It is nearly all over now, Sir Henry,' said the old man.

'I hope not,' said the visitor, with the tone usual on such occasions. 'You may rally yet, Mr. Bertram.'

'Rally?' And there was something in the old man's voice that faintly recalled the bitter railing sound of other days. 'No; I don't suppose I shall ever rally much more.'

'Well; we can only hope for the best. That's what I do, I can assure you.'

'That is true. We do hope for the best—all of us. I can still do that, if I do nothing else.'

'Of course,' said Sir Henry. And then he stood still for a while, meditating how best he might make use of his present opportunity. What could he say to secure some fraction of the hundreds of thousands which belonged to the dying man? That he had a right to at least a moiety of them his inmost bosom told him; but how should he now plead his rights? Perhaps after all it would have been as well for him to have remained in London.

'Mr. Bertram,' at last he said, 'I hope you

won't think it unbecoming in me if I say one word about business in your present state?"

'No—no—no,' said the old man. 'I can't do much, as you see; but I'll endeavour to listen.'

'You can't be surprised that I should be anxious about my wife.'

'Umph!' said Mr. Bertram. 'You haven't treated her very well, it seems.'

'Who says so?'

'A woman wouldn't leave a fine house in London, to shut herself up with a sick old man here, if she were well treated. I don't want any one to tell me that.'

'I can hardly explain all this to you now, sir; particularly—'

'Particularly as I am dying. No, you cannot. George, give me a glass of that stuff. I am very weak, Sir Henry, and can't say much more to you.'

'May I ask you this one question, sir? Have you provided for your granddaughter?'

'Provided for her!' and the old man made a sadly futile attempt to utter the words with that ominous shriek which a few years since would have been sure to frighten any man who would have asked such a question. 'What sort of man can he be, George, to come to me now with such a question?' And so saying, he pulled the clothes over him as though resolved to hold no further conversation.

'He is very weak,' said George. 'I think you had better leave him.'

A hellish expression came across the lawyer's face. 'Yes,' he said to himself; 'go away, that I may leave you here to reap the harvest by yourself. Go away, and know myself to be a beggar.' He had married this man's grandchild, and yet he was to be driven from his bedside like a stranger.

'Tell him to go,' said Mr. Bertram. 'He will know it all in a day or two.'

'You hear what he says,' whispered George.

'I do hear,' muttered the other, 'and I will remember.'

'He hardly thinks I would alter my will now, does he? Perhaps he has pen and ink in his pocket, ready to do it.'

'I have only spoken in anxiety about my wife,' said Sir Henry; 'and I thought you would remember that she was your child's daughter.'

'I do remember it. George, why doesn't he leave me?'

'Harcourt, it will be better that you should go,' said Bertram; 'you can have no idea how weak my uncle is;' and he gently opened the door.

'Good-bye, Mr. Bertram. I had not intended to disturb you.' And so saying, Sir Henry slunk away.

'You know what his will is, of course,' said

Sir Henry, when they were again in the dining-room.

'I have not the slightest idea on the subject,' said the other; 'not the remotest conception. He never speaks to me about it.'

'Well; and now for Lady Harcourt. Where shall I find her?'

To this question George gave no answer; nor was he able to give any. Caroline was no longer in the drawing-room. Sir Henry insisted that he would see her, and declared his intention of staying in the house till he did so. But Miss Baker at last persuaded him that all his efforts would be useless. Nothing but force would induce Lady Harcourt to meet him.

'Then force shall be used,' said Sir Henry.

'At any rate not now,' said George.

'What, sir! do you set yourself up as her protector? Is she base enough to allow you to interfere between her and her husband?'

'I am her protector at the present moment, Sir Henry. What passed between us long since has been now forgotten. But we are still cousins; and while she wants protection, I shall give it to her.'

'Oh, you will; will you?'

'Certainly. I look upon her as though she were my sister. She has no other brother.'

'That's very kind of you, and very complaisant

of her. But what if I say that I don't choose that she should have any such brother? Perhaps you think that as I am only her husband, I ought not to have any voice in the matter?"

"I do not suppose that you can care for her much, after the word you once used to her."

"And what the devil is it to you what word I used to her? That's the tack you go on, is it? Now, I'll tell you fairly what I shall do. I will wait till the breath is out of that old man's body, and then I shall take my wife out of this house—by force, if force be necessary." And so saying, Sir Henry turned to the front door, and took his departure, without making any further adieu.

"What dreadful trouble we shall have!" whimpered Miss Baker, almost in tears.

Things went on at Hadley for three days longer without any change, except that Mr. Bertram became weaker, and less inclined to speak. On the third morning, he did say a few words:—"George, I begin to think I have done wrong about you; but I fear it is too late."

His nephew declared that he was sure that things would turn out well, muttering any platitude which might quiet the dying man.

"But it is too late, isn't it?"

"For any change in your will, sir? Yes, it is too late. Do not think of it."

"Ah, yes; it would be very troublesome—very

troublesome. Oh, me ! It has nearly come now, George ; very nearly.'

It had very nearly come. He did not again speak intelligibly to any of them. In his last hours he suffered considerably, and his own thoughts seemed to irritate him. But when he did mutter a few words, they seemed to refer to trivial matters—little plagues which dying men feel as keenly as those who are full of life. To the last he preferred George either to his niece or to his granddaughter ; and was always best pleased when his nephew was by him. Once or twice he mentioned Mr. Pritchett's name ; but he showed his dissent when they proposed to send for his man of business.

On the afternoon of that day, he breathed his last in the presence of his three relatives. His nearest relative, indeed, was not there ; nor did they dare to send for him. He had latterly expressed so strong a disgust at the very name of Sir Lionel, that they had ceased by common consent to mention Bertram's father. He seemed to be aware that his last moments were approaching, for he would every now and then raise his withered hand from off the bed, as though to give them warning. And so he died, and the eyes of the rich man were closed.

He died full of years, and perhaps in one, and that the most usual acceptation of the word, full

of honour. He owed no man a shilling, had been true to all his engagements, had been kind to his relatives with a rough kindness : he had loved honesty and industry, and had hated falsehood and fraud : to him the herd, born only to consume the fruits, had ever been odious ; that he could be generous, his conduct in his nephew's earliest years had plainly shown : he had carried, too, in his bosom a heart not altogether hardened against his kind, for he had loved his nephew, and, to a certain extent, his niece also, and his granddaughter.

But in spite of all this, he had been a bad man. He had opened his heart to that which should never find admittance to the heart of man. The iron of his wealth had entered into his very soul. He had made half a million of money, and that half-million had been his god—his only god—and, indeed, men have but one god. The true worship of the one loved shrine prevents all other worship. The records of his money had been his deity. There, in his solitude at Hadley, he had sat and counted them as they grew, mortgages and bonds, deeds and scrip, shares in this and shares in that, thousands in these funds and tens of thousands in those. To the last, he had gone on buying and selling, buying in the cheap market and selling in the dear ; and everything had gone well with him.

Everything had gone well with him ! Such was the City report of old Mr. Bertram. But let the reader say how much, or rather how little, had gone well. Faustus-like, he had sold himself to a golden Mephistopheles, and his Margaret had turned to stone within his embrace.

How many of us make Faust's bargain ! The bodily attendance of the devil may be mythical ; but in the spirit he is always with us. And how rarely have we the power to break the contract ! The London merchant had so sold himself. He had given himself body and soul to a devil. The devil had promised him wealth, and had kept his word. And now the end had come, though the day of his happiness had not yet arrived.

But the end had not come. All this was but the beginning. If we may believe that a future life is to be fitted to the desires and appetites as they are engendered here, what shall we think of the future of a man whose desire has been simply for riches, whose appetite has been for heaps of money ? How miserably is such a poor wretch cheated ! How he gropes about, making his bargain with blind eyes ; thinking that he sees beyond his neighbours ! Who is so green, so soft, so foolishly the victim of the sorriest sharper as this man ? Weigh out all his past, and what has it been ? Weigh out his future—if you can—and think what it must be. Poor, dull Faustus !



What ! thou hast lost everything among the thimble-riggers ? Poor, dull, stupid wretch !

Mr. Bertram had not been a good man, nor had he been a wise man. But he had been highly respectable, and his memory is embalmed in tons of marble and heaps of monumental urns. Epitaphs, believed to be true, testify to his worth ; and deeds, which are sometimes as false as epitaphs, do the same. He is a man of whom the world has agreed to say good things ; to whom fame, that rich City fame, which speaks with a cornet-a-piston made of gold, instead of a brazen trumpet, has been very kind.—But, nevertheless, he was not a good man. As regards him, it will only remain for us to declare what was his will, and that shall be done in the next chapter.

It was settled that he should be buried on the sixth day after his death, and that his will should be read after his funeral. George had now to manage everything, and to decide who should be summoned to the reading. There were two whom he felt bound to call thither, though to them the reading he knew would be a bitter grief. There was, in the first place, his father, Sir Lionel, whose calls for money had not of late decreased in urgency. It would be seemly that he should come ; but the opening of the will would not be a pleasant hour for him. Then there would be Sir Henry. He also was, of course, summoned,

painful as it was to his wife to have to leave the house at such a time. Nor, indeed, did he wait to be invited ; for he had written to say that he should be there before he received George Bertram's note. Mr. Pritchett also was sent for, and the old man's attorney.

And then, when these arrangements had been made, the thoughts of the living reverted from the dead to themselves. How should those three persons who now occupied that house so lovingly provide for themselves ? and where should they fix their residence ? George's brotherly love for his cousin was very well in theory : it was well to say that the past had been forgotten ; but there are things for which no memory can lose its hold. He and Caroline had loved each other with other love than that of a brother and a sister ; and each knew that they two might not dwell under the same roof. It was necessary to talk over these matters, and in doing so it was very hard not to touch on forbidden subjects.

Caroline had made up her mind to live again with her aunt—had made up her mind to do so, providing that her husband's power was not sufficient to prevent it. Miss Baker would often tell her that the law would compel her to return to her lord ; that she would be forced to be again the mistress of the house in Eaton Square, and again live as the prosperous wife of the prosperous

politician. To this Caroline had answered but little ; but that little had been in a manner that had thoroughly frightened Miss Baker. Nothing, Lady Harcourt had said, nothing should induce her to do so.

‘But if you cannot help yourself, Caroline?’

‘I will help myself. I will find a way to prevent, at any rate, that—’ So much she had said, but nothing further : and so much Miss Baker had repeated to George Bertram, fearing the worst.

It was not till the day before the funeral that Caroline spoke to her cousin on the subject.

‘George,’ she said to him, ‘shall we be able to live here ?—to keep on this house ?’

‘You and Miss Baker, you mean ?’

‘Yes ; aunt and I. We should be as quiet here as anywhere,—and I am used to these people now.’

‘It must depend on the will. The house was his own property ; but, doubtless, Miss Baker could rent it.’

‘We should have money enough for that, I suppose.’

‘I should hope so. But we none of us know anything yet. All your own money—the income, at least, coming from it—is in Sir Henry’s hands.’

‘I will never condescend to ask for that,’ she said. And then there was a pause in their conversation.

'George,' she continued, after a minute or two, 'you will not let me fall into his hands ?'

He could not help remembering that his own mad anger had already thrown her into the hands which she now dreaded so terribly. Oh, if those two last years might but pass away as a dream, and leave him free to clasp her to his bosom as his own ! But the errors of past years will not turn themselves to dreams. There is no more solid stuff in this material world than they are. They never melt away, or vanish into thin air.

'Not if it can be avoided,' he replied.

'Ah ! but it can be avoided ; can it not ? Say that you know it can. Do not make me despair. It cannot be that he has a right to imprison me.'

'I hardly know what he has a right to do. But he is a stern man, and will not easily be set aside.'

'But you will not desert me ?'

'No ; I will not desert you. But—'

'But what ?'

'For your sake, Caroline, we must regard what people will say. Our names have been mixed together ; but not as cousins.'

'I know, I know. But, George, you do not suppose I intended you should live here ? I was not thinking of that. I know that that may not be.'

'For myself, I shall keep my chambers in Lon-

don. I shall just be able to starve on there ; and then I shall make one more attempt at the bar.'

' And I know you will succeed. You are made for success at last ; I have always felt that.'

' A man must live somehow. He must have some pursuit ; and that is more within my reach than any other : otherwise I am not very anxious for success. What is the use of it all ? Of what use will it be to me now ?'

' Oh, George !'

' Well, is it not true ?'

' Do not tell me that I have made shipwreck of all your fortune !'

' No ; I do not say that you have done it. It was I that drove the bark upon the rocks ; I myself. But the timbers on that account are not the less shattered.'

' You should strive to throw off that feeling. You have so much before you in the world.'

' I have striven. I have thought that I could love other women. I have told others that I did love them ; but my words were false, and they and I knew that they were false. I have endeavoured to think of other things—of money, ambition, politics ; but I can care for none of them. If ever a man cut his own throat, I have done so.'

She could not answer him at once, because she was now sobbing, and the tears were streaming

from her eyes. ‘And what have I done?’ she said at last. ‘If your happiness is shattered, what must mine be? I sometimes think that I cannot live and bear it. With him,’ she added, after another pause, ‘I will not live and bear it. If it comes to that, I will die, George;’ and rising from her chair, she walked across the room, and took him sharply by the arm. ‘George,’ she said, ‘you will protect me from that; I say that you will save me from that.’

‘Protect you!’ said he, repeating her words, and hardly daring to look into her face. How could he protect her? how save her from the lord she had chosen for herself? It might be easy enough for him to comfort her now with promises; but he could not find it in his heart to hold out promises which he could not fulfil. If, after the reading of the will, Sir Henry Harcourt should insist on taking his wife back with him, how could he protect her—he, of all men in the world?

‘You will not give me up to him!’ she said, wildly. ‘If you do, my blood will lie upon your head. George! George! say that you will save me from that! To whom can I look now but to you?’

‘I do not think he will force you away with him.’

‘But if he does? Will you stand by and see me so used?’



' Certainly not ; but, Caroline—'

' Well.'

' It will be better that I should not be driven to interfere. The world will forget that I am your cousin, but will remember that I was once to have been your husband.'

' The world ! I am past caring for the world. It is nothing to me now if all London knows how it is with me. I have loved, and thrown away my love, and tied myself to a brute. I have loved, and do love ; but my love can only be a sorrow to me. I do not fear the world ; but God and my conscience I do fear. Once, for one moment, George, I thought that I would fear nothing. Once, for one moment, I was still willing to be yours ; but I remembered what you would think of me if I should so fall, and I repented my baseness. May God preserve me from such sin ! But, for the world—why should you or I fear the world ?'

' It is for you that I fear it. It would grieve me to hear men speak lightly of your name.'

' Let them say what they please ; the wretched are always trodden on. Let them say what they please. I deserved it all when I stood before the altar with that man ; when I forbade my feet to run, or my mouth to speak, though I knew that I hated him, and owned it to my heart. What shall I do, George, to rid me of that sin ?'

She had risen and taken hold of his arm when first she asked him to protect her, and she was still standing beside the chair on which he sat. He now rose also, and said a few gentle words, such as he thought might soothe her.

‘Yes,’ she continued, as though she did not heed him, ‘I said to myself almost twenty times during that last night that I hated him in my very soul, that I was bound in honour even yet to leave him—in honour, and in truth, and in justice. But my pride forbade it—my pride and my anger against you.’

‘It is useless to think of it now, dear.’

‘Ah, yes! quite useless. Would that I had done it then—then, at the last moment. They asked me whether I would love that man. I whispered inwardly to myself that I loathed him; but my tongue said “Yes,” out loud. Can such a lie as that, told in God’s holy temple, sworn before his own altar—can such perjury as that ever be forgiven me?’

‘But I shall sin worse still if I go back to him,’ she continued, after a while. ‘I have no right, George, to ask anything from your kindness as a cousin; but for your love’s sake, your old love, which you cannot forget, I do ask you to save me from this. But it is this rather that I ask, that you will save me from the need of saving myself.’

That evening George sat up late alone, preparing for the morrow's work, and trying to realize the position in which he found himself. Mr. Pritchett, had he been there, would have whispered into his ears, again and again, those ominous and all-important words, "Half a million of money, Mr. George; half a million of money!" And, indeed, though Mr. Pritchett was not there, the remembrance of those overflowing coffers did force themselves upon his mind. Who can say that he, if placed as Bertram then was, would not think of them?

He did think of them—not over deeply, nor with much sadness. He knew that they were not to be his; neither the whole of them, nor any part of them. So much his uncle had told him with sufficient plainness. He knew also that they might all have been his: and then he thought of that interview in which Mr. Bertram had endeavoured to beg from him a promise to do that for which his own heart so strongly yearned. Yes; he might have had the bride, and the money too. He might have been sitting at that moment with the wife of his bosom, laying out in gorgeous plans the splendour of their future life. It would be vain to say that there was no disappointment at his heart.

But yet there was within his breast a feeling of gratified independence which sufficed to support

him. At least he might boast that he had not sold himself; not aloud, but with that inward boasting which is so common with most of us. There was a spirit within him endowed with a greater wealth than any which Mr. Pritchett might be able to enumerate; and an inward love, the loss of which could hardly have been atoned for even by the possession of her whom he had lost. Nor was this the passion which men call self-love. It was rather a vigorous knowledge of his own worth as a man; a strong will, which taught him that no price was sufficient to buy his assent that black should be reckoned white, or white be reckoned black.

His uncle, he knew, had misunderstood him. In rejecting the old man's offers, he had expressed his contempt for riches—for riches, that is, as any counterbalance to independence. Mr. Bertram had taken what he said for more than it was worth; and had supposed that his nephew, afflicted with some singular lunacy, disliked money for its own sake. George had never cared to disabuse his uncle's mind. Let him act as he will, he had said to himself, it is not for me to dictate to him, either on the one side or the other. And so the error had gone on.

To-morrow morning the will would be read, and George would have to listen to the reading of it. He knew well enough that the world

looked on him as his uncle's probable heir, and that he should have to bear Mr. Pritchett's hardly expressed pity, Sir Henry's malignant pleasure, and Sir Lionel's loud disgust. All this was nearly as bad to him as the remembrance of what he had lost; but by degrees he screwed his courage up to the necessary point of endurance.

'What is Pritchett to me, with his kind, but burdensome solicitude? what Sir Henry's mad anger? How can they affect my soul? or what even is my father? Let him rave. I care not to have compassion on myself; why should his grief assail me—grief which is so vile, so base, so unworthy of compassion?'

And thus schooling himself for the morrow, he betook himself to bed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WILL.

THE only attendants at old Mr. Bertram's funeral were his nephew, Mr. Pritchett, and the Hadley doctor. The other gentlemen were to be present only at the more interesting ceremony of reading the will. Sir Lionel had written to say that he was rather unwell ; that he certainly would come up from Littlebath so as to be present at the latter performance ; but that the very precarious state of his health, and the very inconvenient hours of the trains, unhappily prevented him from paying the other last sad duty to his brother's remains. Sir Henry Harcourt had plainly demanded at what hour the will would be read ; and Mr. Stickatit, junior—Mr. George Stickatit—of the firm of Dry and Stickatit, had promised to be at Hadley punctually at two p.m. And he kept his word.

Mr. Pritchett came down by an early train, and, as was fit on such an occasion, was more melancholy than usual. He was very melancholy and

very sad, for he felt that that half-million of money was in a great jeopardy ; and, perhaps, even the death of his old friend of forty years' standing may have had some effect on him. It was a mingled feeling that pervaded him. ‘Oh, Mr. George !’ he said, just before they went to the churchyard, ‘we are grass of the field, just grass of the field ; here to-day, and gone to-morrow ; flourishing in the morning, and cast into the oven before night ! It behoves such frail, impotent creatures to look close after their interests—half a million of money ! I’m afraid you didn’t think enough about it, Mr. George.’

And then the Hadley bells were rung again ; but they were not rung loudly. It seemed to Bertram that no one noticed that anything more than usually sad was going on. He could hardly realise it to himself that he was going to put under the ground almost his nearest relative. The bells rang out a dirge, but they did it hardly above their breath. There were but three boys gathered at the little gate before the door to see the body of the rich man carried to his last home. George stood with his back to the empty dining-room fireplace : on one side stood Mr. Pritchett, and on the other the Barnet doctor. Very few words passed between them, but they were not in their nature peculiarly lugubrious. And then there was a scuffling heard on the stairs—a sub-

dued, decent undertaker's scuffling—as some hour or two before had been heard the muffled click of a hammer. Feet scuffed down the stairs, outside the dining-room door, and along the passage. And then the door was opened, and in low, decent undertaker's voice, red-nosed, sombre, well-fed Mr. Mortmain told them that they were ready.

'These are yours, sir,' and he handed a pair of black gloves to George. 'And these are yours, sir,' and he gave another pair to the doctor. But the doctor held them instead of putting them on; otherwise Mr. Mortmain could not be expected to change them after the ceremony for a pair of lighter colour. They understood each other; and what could a country doctor do with twenty or thirty pairs of black gloves a year? 'And these yours, Mr. Pritchett.'

'Oh, Mr. George!' sighed Pritchett. 'To think it should come to this! But he was a good gentleman; and very successful—very successful.'

There were not ten people in the church or in the churchyard during the whole time of the funeral. To think that a man with half a million of money could die and be got rid of with so little parade! What money could do—in a moderate way—was done. The coffin was as heavy as lead could make it. The cloth of the best. The plate

upon it was of silver, or looked like it. There was no room for an equipage of hearses and black coaches, the house was so unfortunately near to the churchyard. It was all done in a decent, sombre, useful, money-making way, as beseemed the remains of such a man.

But it was on 'Change that he was truly buried ; in Capel Court that his funeral sermon was duly preached. These were the souls that knew him, the ears to which his name loomed large. He had been true and honest in all his dealings—there, at least. He had hurt nobody by word or deed —excepting in the way of trade. And had kept his hands from picking and stealing—from all picking, that is, not warranted by City usage, and from all stealing that the law regards as such. Therefore, there, on 'Change, they preached his funeral sermon loudly, and buried him with all due honours.

Two had been named for the reading of the will, seeing that a train arrived at 1.45 P.M. And, therefore, when the ceremony was over, George and Mr. Pritchett had to sit together in the dining-room till that time arrived. The doctor, who did not expect much from the will, had gone away, perhaps to prepare other friends for similar occupation. It was a tedious hour that they so passed, certainly ; but at last it did make itself away. Lunch was brought in ; and the sherry,

which had been handed round with biscuits before the funeral, was again put on the table. Mr. Pritchett liked a glass of sherry, though it never seemed to have other effect on him than to make his sadness of a deeper dye. But at last, between this occupation and the muttering of a few scraps of a somewhat worldly morality, the hour did wear itself away, and the hand of the old clock pointed to two.

The three gentlemen had come down by the same train, and arrived in a fly together. Mr. George Stickatit, junior, paid for the accommodation ; which was no more than right, for he could put it in the bill, and Sir Lionel could not. The mind of Sir Henry was too much intent on other things to enable him to think about the fly.

‘ Well, George,’ said Sir Lionel ; ‘ so it’s all over at last. My poor brother ! I wish I could have been with you at the funeral ; but it was impossible. The ladies are not here ?’—This he added in a whisper. He could not well talk about Lady Harcourt, and he was not at the present moment anxious to see Miss Baker.

‘ They are not here to-day,’ said George, as he pressed his father’s hand. He did not think it necessary to explain that they were staying at good old Mrs. Jones’s, on the other side of the Green.

‘ I should have been down for the funeral,’ said

Mr. Stickatit ; ‘but I have been kept going about the property, ever since the death, up to this moment, I may say. There’s the document, gentlemen.’ And the will was laid on the table. ‘The personality will be sworn under five. The real will be about two more. Well, Pritchett, and how are you this morning ?’

Sir Henry said but little to anybody. Bertram put out his hand to him as he entered, and he just took it, muttering something ; and then, having done so, he sat himself down at the table. His face was not pleasant to be seen ; his manner was ungracious, nay, more than that, uncourteous—almost brutal ; and it seemed as though he were prepared to declare himself the enemy of all who were there assembled. To Sir Lionel he was known, and it may be presumed that some words had passed between them in the fly ; but there in the room he said no word to any one, but sat leaning back in an arm-chair, with his hands in his pockets, scowling at the table before him.

‘A beautiful day, is it not, Mr. Pritchett ?’ said Sir Lionel, essaying to make things pleasant, after his fashion.

‘A beautiful day—outwardly, Sir Lionel,’ sighed Mr. Pritchett. ‘But the occasion is not comfortable. We must all die, though ; all of us, Mr. George.’

‘But we shall not all of us leave such a will as

that behind us,' said Mr. Stickatit. 'Come, gentlemen, are we ready? Shall we sit down?'

George got a chair for his father, and put it down opposite to that of Sir Henry's. Mr. Pritchett humbly kept himself in one corner. The lawyer took the head of the table, and broke open the envelope which contained the will with a degree of gusto which showed that the occupation was not disagreeable to him. 'Mr. Bertram,' said he, 'will you not take a chair?'

'Thank you, no; I'll stand here, if you please,' said George. And so he kept his position with his back to the empty fireplace.

All of them, then, were somewhat afraid of having their disappointment read in their faces, and commented upon by the others. They were all of them schooling themselves to bear with an appearance of indifference the tidings which they dreaded to hear. All of them, that is, except the attorney. He hoped nothing, and feared nothing.

Mr. Pritchett nearly closed his eyes, and almost opened his mouth, and sat with his hands resting on his stomach before him, as though he were much too humble to have any hopes of his own.

Sir Lionel was all smiles. What did he care? Not he. If that boy of his should get anything, he, as an affectionate father, would, of course, be glad. If not, why then his dear boy could do

without it. That was the intended interpretation of his look. And judging of it altogether, he did not do it badly ; only he deceived nobody. On such occasions, one's face, which is made up for deceit, never does deceive any one. But, in truth, Sir Lionel still entertained a higher hope than any other of the listeners there. He did not certainly expect a legacy himself, but he did think that George might still be the heir. As Sir Henry was not to be, whose name was so likely ? And, then, if his son, his dear son George, should be lord of two, nay, say only one, of those many hundred thousand pounds, what might not a fond father expect ?

Sir Henry was all frowns ; and yet he was not quite hopeless. The granddaughter, the only lineal descendant of the dead man, was still his wife. Anything left to her must in some sort be left to him, let it be tied up with ever so much care. It might still be probable that she might be named the heiress—perhaps the sole heiress. It might still be probable that the old man had made no new will since Caroline had left his home in Eaton Square. At any rate, there would still be a ground, on which to fight, within his reach, if Lady Harcourt should be in any way enriched under the will. And if so, no tenderness on his part should hinder him from fighting out that fight as long as he had an inch on which to stand.

Bertram neither hoped anything, nor feared anything, except this—that they would look at him as a disappointed man. He knew that he was to have nothing; and although, now that the moment had come, he felt that wealth might possibly have elated him, still the absence of it did not make him in any degree unhappy. But it did make him uncomfortable to think that he should be commiserated by Mr. Pritchett, sneered at by Harcourt, and taunted by his father.

‘Well, gentlemen, are we ready?’ said Mr. Stickatit again. They were all ready, and so Mr. Stickatit began.

I will not give an acute critic any opportunity for telling me that the will, as detailed by me, was all illegal. I have not by me the ipsissima verba; nor can I get them now, as I am very far from Doctors’ Commons. So I will give no verbal details at all.

The will, moreover, was very long—no less than fifteen folios. And that amount, though it might not be amiss in a three-volume edition, would be inconvenient when the book comes to be published for eighteen-pence. But the gist of the will was as follows.

It was dated in the October last gone by, at the time when George was about to start for Egypt, and when Lady Harcourt had already left her husband. It stated that he, George Bertram,

senior, of Hadley, being in full use of all his mental faculties, made this as his last will and testament. And then he willed and devised—

Firstly, that George Stickatit, junior, of the firm of Day and Stickatit, and George Bertram, junior, his nephew, should be his executors ; and that a thousand pounds each should be given to them, provided they were pleased to act in that capacity.

When Sir Lionel heard that George was named as one of the executors, he looked up at his son triumphantly ; but when the thousand pounds were named, his face became rather long, and less pleasant than usual. A man feels no need to leave a thousand pounds to an executor if he means to give him the bulk of his fortune.

Secondly, he left three hundred pounds a year for life to his dear, old, trusty servant, Samuel Pritchett. Mr. Pritchett put his handkerchief up to his face, and sobbed audibly. But he would sooner have had two or three thousand pounds ; for he also had an ambition to leave money behind him.

Thirdly, he bequeathed five hundred pounds a year for life to Mary Baker, late of Littlebath, and now of Hadley ; and the use of the house at Hadley if she chose to occupy it. Otherwise, the house was to be sold, and the proceeds were to go to his estate.

Sir Lionel, when he heard this, made a short

calculation in his mind whether it would now be worth his while to marry Miss Baker; and he decided that it would not be worth his while.

Fourthly, he gave to his executors above-named a sum of four thousand pounds, to be invested by them in the Three per Cent. Consols, for the sole use and benefit of his granddaughter, Caroline Harcourt. And the will went on to say, that he did this, although he was aware that sufficient provision had already been made for his granddaughter, because he feared that untoward events might make it expedient that she should have some income exclusively her own.

Sir Henry, when this paragraph was read—this paragraph from which his own name was carefully excluded—dashed his fist down upon the table, so that the ink leaped up out of the inkstand that stood before the lawyer, and fell in sundry blots upon the document. But no one said anything. There was blotting-paper at hand, and Mr. Stickatit soon proceeded.

In its fifth proviso, the old man mentioned his nephew George. ‘I wish it to be understood,’ he said, ‘that I love my nephew, George Bertram, and appreciate his honour, honesty, and truth.’ Sir Lionel once more took heart of grace, and thought that it might still be all right. And George himself felt pleased; more pleased than he had thought it possible that he should have been at

the reading of that will. ‘But,’ continued the will, ‘I am not minded, as he is himself aware, to put my money into his hands for his own purposes.’ It then went on to say, that a further sum of four thousand pounds was given to him as a token of affection.

Sir Lionel drew a long breath. After all, five thousand pounds was the whole sum total that was rescued out of the fire. What was five thousand pounds? How much could he expect to get from such a sum as that? Perhaps, after all, he had better take Miss Baker. But then her pittance was only for her life. How he did hate his departed brother at that moment!

Poor Pritchett wheezed and sighed again. ‘Ah!’ said he to himself. ‘Half a million of money gone; clean gone! But he never would take my advice!’

But George felt now that he did not care who looked at him, who commiserated him. The will was all right. He did not at that moment wish it to be other than that the old man had made it. After all their quarrels, all their hot words and perverse thoughts towards each other, it was clear to him now that his uncle had, at any rate, appreciated him. He could hear the remainder of it quite unmoved.

There were some other legacies to various people in the City, ‘none of them being considerable in

amount. Five hundred pounds to one, one thousand pounds to another, fifty pounds to a third, and so on. And then came the body of the will —the very will indeed.

And so Mr. George Bertram willed, that after the payment of all his just debts, and of the legacies above recapitulated, his whole property should be given to his executors, and by them expended in building and endowing a college and alms-house, to be called ‘The Bertram College,’ for the education of the children of London fishmongers, and for the maintenance of the widows of such fishmongers as had died in want. Now Mr. Bertram had been a member of the Honourable Company of Fishmongers.

And that was the end of the will. And Mr. Stickatit, having completed the reading, folded it up, and put it back into the envelope. Sir Henry, the moment the reading was over, again dashed his fist upon the table. ‘As heir-at-law,’ said he, ‘I shall oppose that document.’

‘I think you’ll find it all correct,’ said Mr. Stickatit, with a little smile.

‘And I think otherwise, sir,’ said the late solicitor-general, in a voice that made them all start. ‘Very much otherwise. That document is not worth the paper on which it is written. And now, I warn you two, who have been named as executors, that such is the fact.’

Sir Lionel began to consider whether it would be better for him that the will should be a will, or should not be a will. Till he had done so, he could not determine with which party he would side. If that were no will, there might be a previous one ; and if so, Bertram might, according to that, be the heir. ‘It is a very singular document,’ said he ; ‘very singular.’

But Sir Henry wanted no allies—wanted no one in that room to side with him. Hostility to them all was his present desire ; to them and to one other—that other one who had brought upon him all this misfortune ; that wife of his bosom, who had betrayed his interests and shattered his hopes.

‘I believe there is nothing further to detain us at the present moment,’ said Mr. Stickatit. ‘Mr. Bertram, perhaps you can allow me to speak to you somewhere for five minutes ?’

‘I shall act,’ said George.

‘Oh, of course. That’s of course,’ said Stickatit. ‘And I also.’

‘Stop one moment, gentlemen,’ shouted Harcourt again. ‘I hereby give you both warning that you have no power to act.’

‘Perhaps, sir,’ suggested Stickatit, ‘your lawyer will take any steps he may think necessary ?’

‘My lawyer, sir, will do as I bid him, and will require no suggestion from you. And now I

have another matter to treat of. Mr. Bertram, where is Lady Harcourt ?'

Bertram did not answer at once, but stood with his back still against the chimney-piece, thinking what answer he would give.

'Where, I say, is Lady Harcourt ? Let us have no juggling, if you please. You will find that I am in earnest.'

'I am not Lady Harcourt's keeper,' said George, in a very low tone of voice.

'No, by G— ! Nor shall you be. Where is she ? If you do not answer my question, I shall have recourse to the police at once.'

Sir Lionel, meaning to make things pleasant, now got up, and went over to his son. He did not know on what footing, with reference to each other, his son and Lady Harcourt now stood ; but he did know that they had loved each other, and been betrothed for years ; he did know, also, that she had left her husband, and that that husband and his son had been the closest friends. It was a great opportunity for him to make things pleasant. He had not the slightest scruple as to sacrificing that 'dear Caroline' whom he had so loved as his future daughter-in-law.

'George,' said he, 'if you know where Lady Harcourt is, it will be better that you should tell Sir Henry. No properly-thinking man will countenance a wife in disobeying her husband.'

‘Father,’ said George, ‘Lady Harcourt is not in my custody. She is the judge of her own actions in this matter.’

‘Is she?’ said Sir Henry. ‘She must learn to know that she is not; and that very shortly. Do you mean to tell me where she is?’

‘I mean to tell you nothing about her, Sir Henry.’

‘George, you are wrong,’ said Sir Lionel. ‘If you know where Lady Harcourt is, you are bound to tell him. I really think you are.’

‘I am bound to tell him nothing, father; nor will I. I will have no conversation with him about his wife. It is his affair and hers—and that, perhaps, of a hundred other people; but it certainly is not mine. Nor will I make it so.’

‘Then you insist on concealing her?’ said Sir Henry.

‘I have nothing to do with her. I do not know that she is concealed at all.’

‘You know where she is?’

‘I do. But, believing as I do that she would rather not be disturbed, I shall not say where you would find her.’

‘I think you ought, George.’

‘Father, you do not understand this matter.’

‘You will not escape in that way, sir. Here you are named as her trustee in this will—’

'I am glad that you acknowledge the will, at any rate,' said Mr. Stickatit.

'Who says that I acknowledge it? I acknowledge nothing in the will. But it is clear, from that document, that she presumes herself to be under his protection. It is manifest that that silly fool intended that she should be so. Now I am not the man to put up with this. I ask you once more, Mr. Bertram, will you tell me where I shall find Lady Harcourt?'

'No, I will not.'

'Very well; then I shall know how to act. Gentlemen, good-morning. Mr. Stickatit, I caution you not to dispose, under that will, of anything of which Mr. Bertram may have died possessed.' And so saying, he took up his hat, and left the house.

And what would he have done had Bertram told him that Lady Harcourt was staying at Mr. Jones's, in the red brick house on the other side of the Green? What can any man do with a recusant wife? We have often been told that we should build a golden bridge for a flying enemy. And if any one can be regarded as a man's enemy, it is a wife who is not his friend.

After a little while, Sir Lionel went away with Mr. Pritchett. Bertram asked them both to stay for dinner, but the invitation was not given in a

very cordial manner. At any rate, it was not accepted.

'Good-bye, then, George,' said Sir Lionel. 'I suppose I shall see you before I leave town. I must say, you have made a bad affair of this will.'

'Good-bye, Mr. George; good-bye,' said Mr. Pritchett. 'Make my dutiful compliments to Miss Baker—and to the other lady.'

'Yes, I will, Mr. Pritchett.'

'Ah, dear! well. You might have had it all, instead of the fishmongers' children, if you had chosen, Mr. George.'

And we also will say good-bye to the two gentlemen, as we shall not see them again in these pages. That Mr. Pritchett will live for the remainder of his days decently, if not happily, on his annuity, may be surmised. That Sir Lionel, without any annuity, but with a fair income paid from the country's taxes, and with such extra pecuniary aid as he may be able to extract from his son, will continue to live indecently at Littlebath—for he never again returned to active service—that also may be surmised. And thus we will make our bows to these old gentlemen—entertaining, however, very different feelings for them.

And soon afterwards Mr. Stickatit also went. Some slight, necessary legal information as to the

executorship was first imparted; Sir Henry's threats were ridiculed; the good fortune of the fishmongers was wondered at, and then Mr. Stick-at-it took his hat. The four gentlemen no doubt went up to London by the same train.

In the evening, Miss Baker and Lady Harcourt came back to their own house. It was Miss Baker's own house now. When she heard what her old friend had done for her, she was bewildered by his generosity. She, at any rate, had received more than she had expected.

'And what does he mean to do?' said Caroline.

'He says that he will dispute the will. But that, I take it, is nonsense.'

'But about—you know what I mean, George?'

'He means to insist on your return. That, at least, is what he threatens.'

'He shall insist in vain. No law that man ever made shall force me to live with him again.'

Whether or no the husband was in earnest, it might clearly be judged, from the wife's face and tone, that she was so. On the next morning, George went up to London, and the two women were left alone in their dull house at Hadley.

CHAPTER XVI.

EATON SQUARE.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT had walked forth first from that room in which the will had been read, and he had walked forth with a threat in his mouth. But he knew when making it that that threat was an empty bravado. The will was as valid as care and law could make it, and the ex-solicitor-general knew very well that it was valid.

He knew, moreover, that the assistance of no ordinary policeman would suffice to enable him to obtain possession of his wife's person ; and he knew also that if he had such possession, it would avail him nothing. He could not pay his debts with her, nor could he make his home happy with her, nor could he compel her to be in any way of service to him. It had all been bravado. But when men are driven into corners—when they are hemmed in on all sides, so that they have no escape, to what else than bravado can they have

recourse? With Sir Henry the game was up; and no one knew this better than himself.

He was walking up and down the platform, with his hat over his brows, and his hands in his trousers-pockets, when Mr. Stickatit came up. 'We shall have a little rain this afternoon,' said Mr. Stickatit, anxious to show that he had dropped the shop, and that having done so, he was ready for any of the world's ordinary converse.

Sir Henry scowled at him from under the pent-house lid of his hat, and passed on in his walk, without answering a word. The thing had gone too far with him for affectation. He did not care to make sacrifice now to any of the world's graces. His inner mind was hostile to that attorney of Bucklersbury, and he could dare to show that it was so. After that, Mr. Stickatit made no further remark to him.

Yes; he could afford now to be forgetful of the world's graces, for the world's heaviest cares were pressing very heavily on him. When a man finds himself compelled to wade through miles of mud, in which he sinks at every step up to his knees, he becomes forgetful of the blacking on his boots. Whether or no his very skin will hold out, is then his thought. And so it was now with Sir Henry. Or we may perhaps say that he had advanced a step beyond that. He was pretty well convinced now that his skin would not hold out.

He still owned his fine house in Eaton Square, and still kept his seat for the Battersea Hamlets. But Baron Brawl, and such like men, no longer came willingly to his call ; and his voice was no longer musical to the occupants of the Treasury bench. His reign had been sweet, but it had been very short. Prosperity he had known how to enjoy, but adversity had been too much for him.

Since the day when he had hesitated to resign his high office, his popularity had gone down like a leaden plummet in the salt water. He had become cross-grained, ill-tempered, and morose. The world had spoken evil of him regarding his wife ; and he had given the world the lie in a manner that had been petulant and injudicious. The world had rejoined, and Sir Henry had in every sense got the worst of it. Attorneys did not worship him as they had done, nor did vice-chancellors and lords-justices listen to him with such bland attention. No legal luminary in the memory of man had risen so quickly and fallen so suddenly. It had not been given to him to preserve an even mind when adversity came upon him.

But the worst of his immediate troubles were his debts. He had boldly resolved to take a high position in London ; and he had taken it. It now remained that the piper should be paid, and the

piper required payment not in the softest language. While that old man was still living, or rather still dying, he had had an answer to give to all pipers. But that answer would suffice him no longer. Every clause in that will would be in the ‘Daily Jupiter’ of the day after to-morrow—the ‘Daily Jupiter’ which had already given a wonderfully correct biography of the deceased great man.

As soon as he reached the London station, he jumped into a cab, and was quickly whirled to Eaton Square. The house felt dull, and cold, and wretched to him. It was still the London season, and Parliament was sitting. After walking up and down his own dining-room for half an hour, he got into another cab, and was whirled down to the House of Commons. But there it seemed as though all the men round him already knew of his disappointment—as though Mr. Bertram’s will had been read in a Committee of the whole House. Men spoke coldly to him, and looked coldly at him; or at any rate, he thought that they did so. Some debate was going on about the Ballot, at which members were repeating their last year’s speeches with new emphasis. Sir Henry twice attempted to get upon his legs, but the Speaker would not have his eye caught. Men right and left of him, who were minnows to him in success, found opportunities for delivering themselves; but the world of Parliament did not wish at present

to hear anything further from Sir Henry. So he returned to his house in Eaton Square.

As soon as he found himself again in his own dining-room, he called for brandy, and drank off a brimming glass; he drank off one, and then another. The world and solitude together were too much for him, and he could not bear them without aid. Then, having done this, he threw himself into his arm-chair, and stared at the fireplace. How tenfold sorrowful are our sorrows when borne in solitude! Some one has said that grief is half removed when it is shared. How little that some one knew about it! Half removed! When it is duly shared between two loving hearts, does not love fly off with eight-tenths of it? There is but a small remainder left for the two to bear between them.

But there was no loving heart here. All alone he had to endure the crushing weight of his misfortunes. How often has a man said, when evil times have come upon him, that he could have borne it all without complaint, but for his wife and children? The truth, however, has been that, but for them, he could not have borne it at all. Why does any man suffer with patience 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,' or put up with 'the whips and scorns of time,' but that he does so for others, not for himself? It is not that we should all be ready, each to make his own quietus

with a bare bodkin ; but that we should run from wretchedness when it comes in our path. Who fights for himself alone ? Who would not be a coward, if none but himself saw the battle—if none others were concerned in it ?

With Sir Henry, there was none other to see the battle, none to take concern in it. If solitude be bad in times of misery, what shall we say of unoccupied solitude ? of solitude, too, without employment for the man who has been used to labour ?

Such was the case with him. His whole mind was out of tune. There was nothing now that he could do ; no work to which he could turn himself. He sat there gazing at the empty fireplace till the moments became unendurably long to him. At last his chief suffering arose, not from his shattered hopes and lost fortunes, but from the leaden weight of the existing hour.

What could he do to shake this off ? How could he conquer the depression that was upon him ? He reached his hand to the paper that was lying near him, and tried to read ; but his mind would not answer to the call. He could not think of the right honourable gentleman's speech, or of the very able leading article in which it was discussed. Though the words were before his eyes, he still was harping back on the injustice of that will, or the iniquity of his wife ; on the

imperturbable serenity of George Bertram, or the false, fleeting friends who had fawned on him in his prosperity, and now threw him over, as a Jonah, with so little remorse.

He dropped the paper on the ground, and then again the feeling of solitude and of motionless time oppressed him with a weight as of tons of lead. He jumped from his chair, and paced up and down the room ; but the room was too confined. He took his hat, and pressing it on his brow, walked out into the open air. It was a beautiful spring evening in May, and the twilight still lingered, though the hour was late. He paced three times round the square, regardless of the noise of carriages and the lights which flashed forth from the revelries of his neighbours. He went on and on, not thinking how he would stem the current that was running against him so strongly ; hardly trying to think ; but thinking that it would be well for him if he could make the endeavour. Alas ! he could not make it !

And then again he returned to the house, and once more sat himself down in the same arm-chair. Was it come to this, that the world was hopeless for him ? One would have said not. He was in debt, it is true ; had fallen somewhat from a high position ; had lost the dearest treasure which a man can have ; not only the treasure, but the power of obtaining such treasure ; for the posses-

sion of a loving wife was no longer a possibility to him. But still he had much ; his acknowledged capacity for law pleadings, his right to take high place among law pleaders, the trick of earning money in that fashion of life ; all these were still his. He had his gown and wig, and forensic brow-beating, brazen scowl ; nay, he still had his seat in Parliament. Why should he have despaired ?

But he did despair—as men do when they have none to whom they can turn them trustingly in their miseries. This man had had friends by hundreds ; good, serviceable, parliamentary, dinner-eating, dinner-giving friends ; fine, pleasant friends, as such friends go. He had such friends by hundreds ; but he had failed to prepare for stormy times a leash or so of true hearts on which, in stress of weather, he could throw himself with undoubting confidence. One such friend he may have had once ; but he now was among his bitterest enemies. The horizon round him was all black, and he did despair.

How many a man lives and dies without giving any sign whether he be an arrant coward, or a true-hearted, brave hero ! One would have said of this man, a year since, that he was brave enough. He would stand up before a bench of judges, with the bar of England round him, and shout forth, with brazen trumpet, things that were

true, or things that were not true ; striking down a foe here to the right, and slaughtering another there to the left, in a manner which, for so young a man, filled beholders with admiration. He could talk by the hour among the Commons of England, and no touch of modesty would ever encumber his speech. He could make himself great, by making others little, with a glance. But, for all that, he was a coward. Misfortune had come upon him, and he was conquered at once.

Misfortune had come upon him, and he found it unendurable—yes, utterly unendurable. The grit and substance of the man within were not sufficient to bear the load which fate had put upon them. As does a deal-table in similar case, they were crushed down, collapsed, and fell in. The stuff there was not good mahogany, or sufficient hard wood, but an unseasoned, soft, porous, deal-board, utterly unfit to sustain such pressure. An unblushing, wordy barrister may be very full of brass and words, and yet be no better than an unseasoned porous deal-board, ev though he have a seat in Parliament.

He rose from his chair, and again took a glass of brandy. How impossible it is to describe the workings of a mind in such a state of misery as that he then endured ! What—what ! was there no release for him ? no way, spite of this black fit, to some sort of rest—to composure of the most

ordinary kind? Was there nothing that he could do which would produce for him, if not gratification, then at least quiescence? To the generality of men of his age, there are resources in misfortune. Men go to billiard-tables, or to cards, or they seek relief in woman's society, from the smiles of beauty, or a laughter-moving tongue. But Sir Henry, very early in life, had thrown those things from him. He had discarded pleasure, and wedded himself to hard work at a very early age. If, at the same time, he had wedded himself to honesty also, and had not discarded his heart, it might have been well with him.

He again sat down, and then he remained all but motionless for some twenty minutes. It had now become dark, but he would have no lights lit. The room was very gloomy with its red embossed paper and dark ruby curtains. As his eye glanced round during the last few moments of the dusk, he remembered how he had inquired of his Caroline how many festive guests might sit at their ease in that room, and eat the dainties which he, with liberal hand, would put before them. Where was his Caroline now? where were his guests? what anxiety now had he that they should have room enough? what cared he now for their dainties?

It was not to be borne. He clasped his hand to his brow, and rising from his chair, he went up

stairs to his dressing-room. For what purpose, he had not even asked himself. Of bed, and rest, and sleep he had had no thought. When there, he again sat down, and mechanically dressed himself—dressed himself as though he were going out to some gay evening-party—was even more than ordinarily particular about his toilet. One white handkerchief he threw aside as spoiled in the tying. He looked specially to his boots, and with scrupulous care brushed the specks of dust from the sleeve of his coat. It was a blessing, at any rate, to have something to do. He did this, and then—

When he commenced his work, he had, perhaps, some remote intention of going somewhere. If so, he had quickly changed his mind, for, having finished his dressing, he again sat himself down in an arm-chair. The gas in his dressing-room had been lighted, and here he was able to look around him and see what resources he had to his hand. One resource he did see.

Ah, me! Yes, he saw it, and his mind approved—such amount of mind as he had then left to him. But he waited patiently awhile—with greater patience than he had hitherto exhibited that day. He waited patiently, sitting in his chair for some hour or so; nay, it may have been for two hours, for the house was still, and the servants were in bed. Then, rising from his chair,

he turned the lock of his dressing-room door. It was a futile precaution, if it meant anything, for the room had another door, which opened to his wife's chamber, and the access on that side was free and open.

Early on the following morning, George Bertram went up to town, and was driven directly from the station to his dull, dingy, dirty chambers in the Temple. His chambers were not as those of practising lawyers. He kept no desk there, and no servant peculiar to himself. It had suited him to have some resting-place for his foot, that he could call his home; and when he was there, he was waited upon by the old woman who called herself the laundress—probably from the fact of her never washing herself or anything else.

When he reached this sweet home on the morning in question, he was told by the old woman that a very express messenger had been there that morning, and that, failing to find him, the express messenger had gone down to Hadley. They had, therefore, passed each other upon the road. The express messenger had left no message, but the woman had learned that he had come from Eaton Square.

‘And he left no letter?’

‘No, sir; no letter. He had no letter; but he was very eager about it. It was something of importance sure—ly.’

It might have been natural that, under such circumstances, George should go off to Eaton Square; but it struck him as very probable that Sir Henry might desire to have some communication with him, but that he, when he should know what that communication was, would in no degree reciprocate that desire. The less that he had to say to Sir Henry Harcourt at present, perhaps, the better. So he made up his mind that he would not go to Eaton Square.

After he had been in his rooms for about half an hour, he was preparing to leave them, and had risen with that object, when he heard a knock at his door, and quickly following the knock, the young attorney who had read the will was in his room.

'You have heard the news, Mr. Bertram?' said he.

'No, indeed! What news? I have just come up.'

'Sir Henry Harcourt has destroyed himself. He shot himself in his own house yesterday, late at night, after the servants had gone to bed!'

George Bertram fell back, speechless, on to the sofa behind him, and stared almost unconsciously at the lawyer.

'It is too true, sir. That will of Mr. Bertram's was too much for him. His reason must have failed him, and now he is no more.' And so was

made clear what were the tidings with which that express messenger had been laden.

There was little or nothing more to be said on the matter between George Bertram and Mr. Stickatit. The latter declared that the fact had been communicated to him on authority which admitted of no doubt ; and the other, when he did believe, was but little inclined to share his speculations on it with the lawyer.

Nor was there much for Bertram to do—not at once. The story had already gone down to Hadley—had already been told there to her to whom it most belonged ; and Bertram felt that it was not at present his province to say kind things to her, or seek to soften the violence of the shock. No, not at present.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

METHINKS it is almost unnecessary to write this last chapter. The story, as I have had to tell it, is all told. The object has been made plain—or, if not, can certainly not be made plainer in these last six or seven pages. The results of weakness and folly—of such weakness and such folly as is too customary among us—have been declared. What further fortune fate had in store for those whose names have been familiar to us, might be guessed by all. But, nevertheless, custom, and the desire of making an end of the undertaken work, and in some sort completing it, compel me to this concluding chapter.

Within six weeks after the death of Sir Henry Harcourt, the vicar of Hurst Staple was married to Adela Gauntlet. Every critic who weighs the demerits of these pages—nay, every reader, indulgent or otherwise, who skims through them,

will declare that the gentleman was not worthy of the lady. I hope so, with all my heart. I do sincerely trust that they will think so. If not, my labour has been in vain.

Mr. Arthur Wilkinson was not worthy of the wife with whom a kind Providence had blessed him—was not worthy of her in the usual acceptance of the word. He was not a bad man, as men go; but she was—. I must not trust myself to praise her, or I shall be told, not altogether truly, that she was of my own creating.

He was not worthy of her. That is, the amount of wealth of character which he brought into that life partnership was, when counted up, much less than her contribution. But that she was fully satisfied with her bargain—that she was so then and so continued—was a part of her worthiness. If ever she weighed herself against him, the scale in which he was placed never in her eyes showed itself to be light. She took him for her lord, and with a leal heart and a loving bosom she ever recognized him as her head and master, as the pole-star to which she must turn, compelled by laws of adamant. Worthy or unworthy, he was all that she expected, all that she desired, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, the father of her bairns, the lord of her bosom, the staff of her maintenance, the prop of her house.

And what man was ever worthy, perfectly

worthy, of a pure, true, and honest girl? Man's life admits not of such purity and honesty; rarely of such truth. But one would not choose that such flowers should remain unplucked because no hands are fit to touch them.

As to the future life of the vicar of Hurst Staple and his wife, it is surely unnecessary to say much—or perhaps anything. It cannot be told that they became suddenly rich. No prime minister, won by her beauty or virtue, placed him upon the bench, or even offered him a deanery. Vicar of Hurst Staple he is still, and he still pays the old allowance out of his well-earned income to his mother, who lives with her daughters at Littlebath. One young lad after another, or generally two at a time, share the frugal meals at the parsonage; and our friend is sometimes heard to boast that none of these guests of his have as yet been plucked. Of the good things of the world, there is quite enough for her; and we may perhaps say nearly enough for him. Who, then, shall croak that they are poor?

And now and then they walk along the river to West Putford; for among their choicest blessings is that of having a good neighbour in the old rectory. And walking there, how can they but think of old sorrows and present joys?

'Ah!' she whispered to him one day, as they crept along the reedy margin in the summer even-

ing, not long after their marriage. ‘Ah! dearest, it is better now than it was when you came here once.’

‘Is it, love?’

‘Is it not? But you misbehaved then—you know you did. You would not trust me then.’

‘I could not trust myself.’

‘I should have trusted you;—in all things, in everything. As I do now.’

And then he cut at the rushes with his walking-stick, as he had done before; and bethought himself that in those days he had been an ass.

And so we will leave them. May they walk in those quiet paths for long days yet to come; and may he learn to know that God has given him an angel to watch at his side!

Of the rosy Miss Todd, there is nothing to be said but this, that she is still Miss Todd, and still rosy. Whether she be now at Littlebath, or Baden, or Dieppe, or Harrogate, at New York, Jerusalem, or Frazer’s River, matters but little. Where she was last year, there she is not now. Where she is now, there she will not be next year. But she still increases the circle of her dearly-loved friends; and go where she will, she, at any rate, does more good to others than others do to her. And so we will make our last bow before her feet.

We have only now to speak of George Bertram

and of Lady Harcourt—of them and of Miss Baker, who need hardly now be considered a personage apart from her niece. No sooner was the first shock of Sir Henry Harcourt's death past, than Bertram felt that it was impossible for him at the present moment to see the widow. It was but a few days since she had declared her abhorrence of the man to whom her fate was linked, apparently for life, and who was now gone. And that declaration had implied also that her heart still belonged to him—to him, George Bertram—him to whom it had first been given—to him, rather, who had first made himself master of it almost without gift on her part. Now, as regarded God's laws, her hand was free again, and might follow her heart.

But death closes many a long account, and settles many a bitter debt. She could remember now that she had sinned against her husband, as well as he against her; that she had sinned the first, and perhaps the deepest. He would have loved her, if she would have permitted it; have loved her with a cold, callous, worldly love; but still with such love as he had to give. But she had married him resolving to give no love at all, knowing that she could give none; almost boasting to herself that she had told him that she had none to give.

The man's blood was, in some sort, on her

head, and she felt that the burden was very heavy. All this Bertram understood, more thoroughly, perhaps, than she did ; and for many weeks he abstained altogether from going to Hadley. He met Miss Baker repeatedly in London, and learned from her how Lady Harcourt bore herself. How she bore herself outwardly, that is. The inward bearing of such a woman in such a condition it was hardly given to Miss Baker to read. She was well in health, Miss Baker said, but pale and silent, stricken, and for hours motionless. ‘Very silent,’ Miss Baker would say. ‘She will sit for a whole morning without speaking a word ; thinking—thinking—thinking.’ Yes ; she had something of which to think. It was no wonder that she should sit silent.

And then after a while he went down to Hadley, and saw her.

‘Caroline, my cousin,’ he said to her.

‘George, George.’ And then she turned her face from him, and sobbed violently. They were the first tears she had shed since the news had reached her.

She did feel, in very deed, that the man’s blood was on her head. But for her, would he not be sitting among the proud ones of the land ? Had she permitted him to walk his own course by himself, would this utter destruction have come upon him ? Or, having sworn to cherish him as

his wife, had she softened her heart towards him, would this deed have been done? No; fifty times a day she would ask herself the question; and as often would she answer it by the same words. The man's blood was upon her head.

For many a long day Bertram said nothing to her of her actual state of existence. He spoke neither of her past life as a wife nor her present life as a widow. The name of that man, whom living they had both despised and hated, was never mentioned between them during all these months.

And yet he was frequently with her. He was with her aunt, rather, and thus she became used to have him sitting in the room beside her. When in her presence, he would talk of their money-matters, of the old man and his will, in which, luckily, the name of Sir Henry Harcourt was not mentioned; and at last they brought themselves to better subjects, higher hopes—hopes that might yet be high, and solace that was trustworthy, in spite of all that was come and gone.

And she would talk to him of himself; of himself as divided from her in all things, except in cousinhood. And, at her instigation, he again put himself to work in the dusky purlieus of Chancery Lane. Mr. Die had now retired, and drank his port and counted his per cents. in the blessed quiet of his evening days; but a Gamaliel

was not wanting, and George sat himself down once more in the porch. We may be sure that he did not sit altogether in vain.

And then Adela—Mrs. Wilkinson we should now call her—visited the two ladies in their silent retirement at Hadley. What words were uttered between her and Lady Harcourt were heard by no other human ear; but they were not uttered without effect. She who had been so stricken could dare again to walk to church, and bear the eyes of the little world around her. She would again walk forth and feel the sun, and know that the fields were green, and that the flowers were sweet, and that praises were to be sung to God.—For His mercy endureth for ever.

It was five years after that night in Eaton Square when George Bertram again asked her—her who had once been Caroline Waddington—to be his wife. But, sweet ladies, sweetest, fairest maidens, there were no soft, honey words of love then spoken; no happy, eager vows, which a novelist may repeat, hoping to move the soft sympathy of your bosoms. It was a cold, sad, dreary matter that offer of his; her melancholy, silent acquiescence, and that marriage in Hadley church, at which none were present but Adela and Arthur, and Miss Baker.

It was Adela who arranged it, and the result has shown that she was right. They now live

together very quietly, very soberly, but yet happily. They have not Adela's blessings. No baby lies in Caroline's arms, no noisy boy climbs on the arm of George Bertram's chair. Their house is childless, and very, very quiet ; but they are not unhappy.

Reader, can you call to mind what was the plan of life which Caroline Waddington had formed in the boldness of her young heart ? Can you remember the aspirations of George Bertram, as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, watching the stones of the temple over against him ?

THE END.

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